



Anemia, Lead Poisoning and Child Care

Childhood Lead Poisoning

Lead poisoning is the most common environmental disease affecting children in our country today. While some lead naturally occurs in the earth's soil, our bodies have no use for it: in fact, it is toxic in any amount in our bodies. We have released lead into our environment by adding it to gasoline, paint, pottery and some industrial processes. Homes and buildings built before 1978 will almost certainly contain some lead-based paint.

Lead poisoning can cause serious health problems for children. It can slow their growth, cause learning disabilities and behavioral problems, and damage major organs such as the kidneys and brain.

Children between the ages of one and six years are most at risk for lead poisoning. Because young children often put their hands and toys in their mouths, they can swallow lead that gets on their hands and toys from dust, dirt and chipping paint.

Lead-based paint is not the only source of lead inside homes and child care programs. Lead can also be found in common household items such as pottery, home medical remedies, cosmetics, imported food products and candies, cans with lead-soldered seams, toys, mini-blinds and other products made of vinyl.

Children at risk for lead poisoning should have a blood lead test. This is the only way to find out if a child has lead poisoning. We don't really know how many children are lead poisoned because so few children are tested. However, all insurance plans pay for the test.

Parents can ask their child's medical provider to perform a lead test.

Child care providers can test their program for paint and products containing lead.

Source: Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch, California Department of Health Services

Lead poisoning can cause anemia.

Anemia makes it easier for lead to get into the blood.

Lead poisoning and anemia are both detected by a blood test.

Lead poisoning and anemia are both preventable.

Practice good nutrition and proper handwashing to help prevent lead poisoning and iron deficiency anemia.

Iron Deficiency Anemia

We need iron to keep our blood strong. Low levels of iron in a child's blood can make the child pale, tired, cranky, eat poorly, get sick more easily, get more infections, and have trouble learning.

Iron is a mineral found in some foods. Eating foods that are high in iron can help keep children healthy and feeling well.

Dairy products like milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream are very low in iron. They are good for bones and teeth because they have a lot of calcium, but drinking too much milk can contribute to anemia. The milk fills the child up and he or she doesn't eat enough food high in iron. Babies should be weaned from the bottle by about 1 year of age. At this age, they should drink only 2 to 3 cups of milk per day (16 -24 oz).

Infants and children should have their blood tested for iron-deficiency anemia. Anemia can be prevented and mild cases can be reversed by eating diets high in iron.

Vitamin C helps the body use iron, so combine foods high in iron and vitamin C in meals and snacks.

Some foods high in iron

Beef, pork, liver, fish cooked beans, tofu, iron-fortified cereals, enriched tortillas and breads, leafy greens, dried fruit and prune juice.

Some foods high in vitamin C

Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, tomatoes, potatoes, bell peppers, oranges, melon and strawberries.

Serve children foods high in iron and vitamin C, and cook in iron pots.

Source: WIC Supplemental Nutrition Branch, California Department of Health Services