

LEAD EXPOSURE DURING PREGNANCY

How it can affect you and your baby, and how to avoid it.

What is lead?



Lead is a toxic metal commonly found in pipes in older housing, paint from before 1980, house dust, old toys, soil/dirt, exhaust from small airplanes, and goods from other countries like ceramics and spices.

How does lead get into the body?

- Breathing in or swallowing dust/soil/dirt
- Drinking water with lead
- Eating food or nonfood items with lead
- Eating from lead-containing ceramic pottery
- Eating or coming in contact with peeling lead paint
- Dust from lead on clothing or shoes from work



If a pregnant woman is exposed, lead passes from the mother to the baby through the umbilical cord. Though small amounts of lead may pass through breastmilk, **breastfeeding is still best for your baby**. Your doctor will determine if it is safe.

How can lead affect my baby?

Lead is harmful to the development of the brain and can cause permanent problems:

- Decreased brain, kidney, and nervous system function
- Reading/learning disabilities and lower IQ
- Increased antisocial and aggressive behavior
- Reduced attention span and coordination
- Decreased muscle and bone growth
- Preterm birth; loss of the fetus at extremely high levels

How do you test for lead in my body?

Lead is checked by a blood test. If you have elevated lead, your baby will be checked at birth.

How can I protect my baby and my family from lead?

- Have yourself tested for lead.
- If you live in housing built before 1978, have your local department of health inspect your home and water for lead.
- Use cold water for drinking and cooking as hot water is more likely to have lead. Run the faucet for 15 seconds to 1 minute if the water has been sitting in the pipes for a while.
- Remove shoes before entering your home to prevent bringing in dust/soil and vacuum regularly.
- Wash hands, toys, and play areas regularly to remove dust or soil, especially low areas where kids can reach.
- Clean your and your children's hand and fingernails.
- Avoid eating nonfood items such as clay, paint chips, soil, and earth.
- Avoid imported eyeliners and progressive hair dyes.
- Avoid using ceramics from outside the country for food storage, cooking, and serving.
- If you live with anybody who is exposed at work, take steps to minimize bringing lead into the house including changing clothes and shoes at work.
- Block off and clean work area when renovating or move temporarily to lead-safe housing.
- Eat a well-balanced healthy diet that has vitamins C and D, iron, calcium, and folate including: fish, meats, cereals, beans, green leafy vegetables, and oranges).

For more information:

[Speak to your doctor if you have any concerns](#)

www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/

partnershipmch.org/programs/leadpoisoning/

www.state.nj.us/health/lh/community/index.shtml

New Jersey Poison Control Center – 1-800-222-1222

www.state.nj.us/health/ceohs/lead

www.nj.gov/health/biomonitoring

MERCURY EXPOSURE DURING PREGNANCY

How it can affect you and your baby, and how to avoid it.



What is mercury?

Mercury (quicksilver) is a toxic metal commonly found in fish, plants, oceans, lakes, skin lightening creams and other cosmetics, mercury thermometers, smoke from coal plants, and compact fluorescent lightbulbs.

How does mercury get into the body?

- Eating fish with mercury
- Exposing skin to spilled mercury
- Breathing mercury vapors
- Using skin lightening creams and cosmetics with mercury



If a pregnant woman is exposed, mercury passes from the mother to the baby through the umbilical cord. Though small amounts of mercury may pass through breastmilk; **breastfeeding is still best for your baby.**

How can mercury affect my baby?

Mercury is harmful to the development of the brain and can cause permanent problems:

- Low brain, bone, and nervous system growth
- Reading/learning disabilities and lower IQ
- Increased chance of behavioral and neurological disorders
- Decreased coordination and attention span
- Kidney failure, blindness, and deafness
- Preterm birth; loss of the fetus at extremely high levels

How do you test for mercury in my body?

Mercury is checked by blood test. If you have elevated mercury levels, your baby will need to be checked after birth.

How can I protect my baby and my family from mercury?

- Have yourself tested for mercury.
- Do not eat seafood that is often high in mercury such as: sharks, swordfish, eel, raw fish, the green gland or bile of crabs and lobsters, or **anything caught in Newark Bay.**
- Avoid imported novelty jewelry because it can have a mercury-containing pendant.
- Avoid handling or breathing in any mercury containing items such as: skin lightening creams, broken mercury thermometers, or broken compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL bulbs).
- Do not handle liquid mercury or allow it to sit in carpeting or other indoor spaces.
- Eat a balanced diet with foods rich in calcium, iron, folate, vitamin C, and vitamin D.
- If anyone you live with works with mercury, clothing can be changed at work and washed separately.

Eating fish is very important during pregnancy because fish have vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats that are good for your baby's development. You can minimize exposure by eating one serving (8 oz. or about the size of the palm of your hand) of wild-caught fish with low mercury content twice a week such as anchovies, sardines, shrimp, tilapia, salmon, cod, and pollock. Check the NJDEP fish advisories listed below for more details.

For more information:

[Speak to your doctor if you have any concerns](#)

www.cdc.gov/biomonitoring/Mercury_FactSheet.html

www.nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/occupational-health-surveillance/mercury.shtml

www.nj.gov/health/biomonitoring

www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/njmainfish.htm

New Jersey Poison Control Center – 1-800-222-1222