

Safe Gardening in Lead-Contaminated Soils

Information for communities near waste sites with possible lead contamination

Lead exposure from eating fruits or vegetables grown in soil that contains lead can be a major health risk, especially to children. Lead in dirt and dust can coat the surface of fruits or vegetables and could be taken up into fruits and vegetables themselves. Protect your health, and learn how to lower your risk for lead exposure with the tips below:

FOLLOW GOOD GARDENING PRACTICES

- Wash your hands immediately after gardening.
- Give preference to growing fruiting plants (tomatoes, corn, etc.).
- Maintain a soil pH of 6.5 to 7 to reduce plant uptake of lead.
- Keep soil moist and use barriers (such as 2–4 inches of mulch) on and around your garden to reduce soil and dust migration.
- Add organic materials (such as peat moss or manure) to your soil. These bind the lead in soil so that vegetables absorb less lead.
- Use [raised beds](#) for gardening.



This fact sheet is provided by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry—Region 5. If you have questions about lead exposure, contact your local health agency, Illinois Department of Public Health, Brian T. Koch, brian.koch@illinois.gov, 217-785-3176, or call or email, Motria Caudill, with Region 5, ATSDR Chicago, 312-886-0267, ldu1@cdc.gov.

CLEAN YOUR PRODUCE

- Wash and scrub fruits and vegetables with a brush to help remove bits of soil and dust.
- Peel or skin root crops such as carrots, potatoes, turnips, and onions before eating them.
- Discard the outer leaves of leafy vegetables (lettuce, cabbage, brussels sprouts, etc.).

GET YOUR CHILD TESTED

- Most children poisoned by lead do not act or look sick.
- The best way to know if your child has lead poisoning is to have their blood tested.
- All Medicaid-enrolled children should be tested for lead at ages 12 and 24 months or between ages 24–72 months if they have not previously been tested.
- Children not enrolled in Medicaid should be tested if they are at-risk for lead poisoning.
- Call your healthcare provider or clinic today to get your child tested for lead poisoning.

Interested in learning more on good gardening practices?

Attend a soilSHOP! [The soil Screening, Health, Outreach, and Partnership Program \(soilSHOP\)](#) is a community event that provides free lead soil screenings and one-on-one health education. These events help you learn how to prevent harmful lead exposures. Contact your local health department or ATSDR regional office agency to learn of events near you.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry