

Fight Lead Poisoning by Eating Healthy Foods

Information for communities near waste sites with possible lead contamination

Eating healthy foods can help slow down how the body takes in lead and help prevent lead poisoning. Lead poisoning can cause learning, hearing, and behavioral problems and can harm your child's brain. Some of these health effects can last a lifetime. Lead exposure is particularly harmful for children younger than 6 years of age because of their rapidly developing brain and frequent hand-to-mouth behavior. Here are some things you can do to fight lead poisoning.

PRACTICE THESE STEPS TO FURTHER PROTECT YOURSELF FROM LEAD

Ensure that you and your family regularly eat...

vitamin-C-rich foods,

- Strawberries, kiwifruit, oranges, orange juice, grapefruits, grapefruit juice, and black currants
- Tomatoes and tomato juice
- Green peppers, broccoli, brussels sprouts, snow peas, and kale

calcium-rich foods,

- Milk, yogurt, cheese, and other dairy products
- Green leafy vegetables (spinach, kale, collard greens, etc.)
- Legumes (beans, lentils, edamame, chickpeas, etc.)
- Sardines, salmon, etc.

iron-rich foods,

- Cereals high in iron and seeds (pumpkin seeds, quinoa)
- Dried fruits, such as raisins or prunes
- Spinach and legumes
- Lean red meats, fish, chicken, shellfish, and organ meats (e.g., liver)

and routinely feed your child these healthy foods.

- Feed your child three healthy meals a day and healthy snacks. Children with empty stomachs may absorb more lead.



EXPOSURES

- Wash hands before preparing and eating food.
- Wash fruits and vegetables well, discard outer leaves of leafy vegetables, and peel root vegetables, such as carrots.
- Limited studies suggest that avoiding high fat foods such as french fries, hot dogs, and potato chips might help your body absorb less lead.
- Bake or broil food instead of frying.
- Use only clean cold water for drinking, cooking, and making baby formula. Hot water from the faucet is more likely to contain lead. Run cold water 30 to 60 seconds before using to flush out impurities that might have gotten into the water from plumbing materials.
- Do not store food in glazed pottery from other countries. If contaminated, the glaze might release lead into the food.



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

Safe Gardening in Lead-Contaminated Soils

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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 (ATSDR)—Region 7**. If you have questions about lead exposure, contact ATSDR at: 913-217-5981; guc0@cdc.gov or the Montgomery County Health Dept., 604 S Union St., Coffeyville, Kansas; 620-251-4210. Contact the **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 7** with questions about lead and the Caney Residential Yards National Priorities (NPL) Superfund Site, at: r7-tsmd@epa.gov; 1-800-223-0425. www.epa.gov/superfund/caneyresidentialyards.

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.



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