Lead Poisoning

Your child's caregiver wants you to have information about lead poisoning. During your child's visit, your child's caregiver may ask you some questions regarding your family's exposure to lead, or may ask you to have your child's blood tested for lead. Lead is found in lead-based paints which were used in most houses built before 1978. It also is present in dust and soil contaminated by:

- Paint.
- Gasoline.
- Other industrial chemicals.

Lead is also present in water that flows through lead pipes and plumbing fixtures. Improperly treated ceramic ware and lead crystal can increase lead content in food. Lead poisoning is preventable.

If there are high levels of lead detected in the body, it can cause children to have problems with their:

- Brain.
- Kidneys.
- Bone marrow (the soft tissue inside bones).

Even if there are lower levels of lead detected in the body, behavior problems and learning difficulties can occur.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of high lead levels can include belly pain, headaches, vomiting, confusion, muscle weakness, seizures, hair loss and low red blood cell count (*anemia*).

TREATMENT

Treatment includes removing the sources of lead in the environment. If the blood lead levels are over 40 micrograms (mcg), a therapy may be needed to bind the lead in the blood and help remove it (*chelation therapy*). Other factors in treatment include good nutrition with foods high in calcium and iron. Repeat blood lead levels and other tests are used to follow the progress of treatment. Be sure to see your child's caregiver for further care as recommended.

Contact your local health department. They may be able to help you and your family find lead problems in your home and tell you if there are any lead problems in the area.

PREVENTION

Families can help prevent their children from having lead poisoning. Lead reducing steps include:

- If you live in a house or an apartment built before 1978, paint that is peeling needs to be removed from all surfaces up to 5 feet above the floor.
- Do not store food or drink in ceramic pottery that may have lead glazes.
- Use only cold water from your tap or bottled water for drinking or cooking (hot water has more dissolved lead).
- Mop your floors frequently and wash off your child's hands and face before eating. Wash any toys that they may suck on or put in their mouth.
- Make sure your child is not exposed to peeling paint that may contain lead. Close off rooms that are being remodeled (by using plastic sheeting) to reduce the spread of dust that may contain lead.

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