



## LEAD-BASED PAINT

### The Issue

Many older homes in Canada are decorated with lead-based paint. Removing or disturbing this paint as part of a renovation project could expose people in the home to serious health risks. However, the risk can be minimized by following a number of guidelines.

### Background

**Lead Poisoning:** People have known for a long time that exposure to lead is dangerous. Lead poisoning can cause anemia. It can also damage the brain and nervous system, resulting in learning disabilities.

The risks are greater for children than for adults, because children's growing bodies are able to absorb lead more easily. Even small amounts of dust containing lead are dangerous to infants and children. Lead taken in by mothers-to-be can also pose a danger to the health of unborn children.

**Lead-based Paint in Homes:** The likelihood that your home contains lead-based paint depends on when it was built and painted. Homes built before 1960 probably do contain lead-based paint. If your home was built after 1980, there is no need for concern about lead levels in interior paint, but there may be lead in the paint used on the outside. There is no need for any concern about leaded paint in homes built after 1992, because all consumer paints produced in Canada and the U.S. by that time were virtually lead-free.

It is not always in your best interest to remove lead-based paint. In some situations leaving leaded paint alone, as long as it is not chipping or within the reach of children, is safer than trying to remove it. Covering the painted area with vinyl wallpaper, wallboard or paneling can provide extra safety.

However, lead-based paint in the home is a serious health hazard when it is chipping or flaking, or it is within the reach of children who might chew on it. In such cases, you should remove the paint following very specific guidelines.

### Minimizing Your Risks

It is not safe to use sanders, heat guns or blowlamps to remove lead-based paint. These methods are counter-productive because they create dust and fumes that contain lead.

Homeowners should consider hiring experts to do the job. However, if you decide to do it yourself, use a chemical paint stripper, preferably one with a paste that can be applied with a brush. Chemical strippers contain potentially harmful substances themselves, so use them carefully, and follow these general guidelines:

- Keep children and pregnant women away from the work area.
- Remove furnishings from the work area. Use plastic sheeting to completely cover anything that cannot be moved.



- Isolate the work area by covering doorways and vents with plastic sheeting and tape. This will prevent the spread of scrapings, chips, and paint particles to other parts of the house.

Before starting work, make sure the room is properly ventilated. Set up a fan so it blows air out through an open window. Start by applying stripper near the fan and work your way back, so the fumes are always blowing away from you.

- Always wear goggles, gloves and a good quality breathing mask. If you spill any chemical stripper on your skin, wash it off right away.
- If you get stripper on your work clothes, take them off immediately. Wash them separately from other clothing.
- Work for about ten minutes at a time, then take a break outdoors in the fresh air. Leave the work area right away if you have trouble breathing, get a headache, or feel dizzy or sick.
- Never eat, drink or smoke while removing paint, and keep anything that might cause a spark or static electricity out of the work area.
- Clean the work area thoroughly at the end of each day. Put paint scrapings and chips in a sealed container marked Hazardous Waste. Then wipe down the work area with a clean damp cloth, and throw the cloth away.
- Do not throw out paint scrapings with the regular trash. Your local municipality can

tell you the best way to dispose of old paint scrapings and other hazardous household wastes.

## Before You Renovate

There are several ways to find out whether the paint in your home is lead-based. Some independent contractors have special X-ray equipment that can sense lead on paint surfaces.

Another option is to send paint chips to a lab that specializes in analyzing lead in paint. The two organizations that certify labs for this purpose are:

- The Standards Council of Canada
- The Canadian Association for Environmental Analytical Laboratories

Be sure to contact the lab first, and follow all directions for gathering and sending the paint chips.

## Need More Info?

Your family doctor can order a simple blood test to find out your level of lead exposure. For further information, contact your doctor or the Poison Information Centre nearest you.

Health Canada - Consumer Products site:  
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/protection/consumer.html>

Health Canada - Lead Information package  
[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/toxics\\_management/publications/leadQandA/toc.htm](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/toxics_management/publications/leadQandA/toc.htm)