

Sneaky Sources of Lead

Lead is a toxic metal with a long legacy of use in pesticides, paints and gasoline. And even though the federal government has banned or severely restricted its use in those applications, the metal is still used in inexpensive consumer goods. With lead being linked to Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, and kidney failure, as well as certain forms of cancer, every major medical and public health organization in the world has admitted there is no safe level of exposure to lead.

The best way to protect you and your loved ones against the heavy metal's toxic effects is to be educated as to where it is most likely to pop up in your home. Old lead paint and contaminated soils remain the two largest sources of exposure, but here are some other unexpected places where you might unknowingly be exposed to lead, along with some ways to avoid it.

Purses: The Center for Environmental Health, a non-profit consumer advocacy group, has tested purses for lead twice in the past five years and found it at shockingly high levels. One \$200 high-end designer wallet, contained 58,700 parts per million (ppm) of lead. Red and yellow paints used to color synthetic bags are the source of the lead.



What can you do? Buy leather, cotton or canvas purses. These materials have been tested, and lead levels are much lower, if there is any at all.



Apple Juice: Lead-based pesticides were used for nearly a century on fruit and other crops. Even though these pesticides were banned in the 1950s, the heavy metals linger, binding to soil and getting absorbed by the crops that grow in it. Consumers Union, the publishers of Consumers Report magazine, recently tested 88 samples of apple and grape juice and found that 25% exceeded the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) voluntary limit of 5 parts per billion (ppb) in bottled water. (The EPA has mandated a limit of zero for lead in drinking water)

What can you do? Eat whole fruit. Unfortunately, juices from both organic and chemically grown apples have the potential to be contaminated with now-banned pesticides, but you will be exposed to much lower levels if you eat whole fruits, rather than drinking the juice. There are roughly three to four apples in one 8-ounce glass of juice.

Faucets: Even though the EPA has set a zero-tolerance policy on lead in water, older homes built before 1986 may have pipes that contain lead, which can migrate into drinking water. Newer homes are not as immune as one might think. At this time, there isn't any regulation on how much lead is used in making the faucets that deliver your drinking water. Faucets can legally contain up to 8% lead, even if they are labeled "lead free." The highest levels of lead are found in brass or chrome-plated brass faucets.



Lead Program
P.O. Box 1231
East Helena
59635

Postal Customer 59635

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**Frequently Requested
Phone Numbers &
Websites:**

East Helena Lead Program: 406-457-8583

**Lewis & Clark City-
County Health Department and Cooperative
Health Center:** 406-
443-2584

Lewisandclarkhealth.org

City of East Helena:

406-227-5321

www.easthelenamt.us

EPA: 406-457-5000

www2.epa.gov/lead

**MT Dept of Environ-
mental Quality:**

www.deq.mt.gov

**Consumer Product
Safety Commission:**

800-638-2772

**Centers for Disease
Control:**

www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/
ACCLPP/
blood_lead_levels

What can you do? Get your water tested and install a filter if needed. If you want your water tested, call the **East Helena Lead Education and Abatement Program (LEAP)** at **406-457-8583**. If tests reveals that your drinking water does contain lead, we recommend that you buy a filter to remove the lead from your water. You can find different filters at the Environmental Working Group's new Water Filter Buying Guide found at the website at the bottom of this article:

Lipstick: According to a 2009 study conducted by the FDA, every one of 22 lipstick samples tested contained lead, ranging from 0.9 ppm to 3.06 ppm. Though the amounts are small, they can have a big impact on the long-term health of women who apply lipstick every day, sometimes multiple times per day. FDA allows up to 20 ppm lead in cosmetic colorants, but that doesn't account for other potential sources. Lead can be a contaminant of petroleum-based ingredients or of minerals, such as zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, both of which can be used in lipsticks.



What can you do? Do some online research before you buy your next tube of lipstick with the website listed at the bottom of the article. The Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep cosmetic database flags products that contain ingredients with the potential to be contaminated with lead.

Vinyl Floor Tiles: Lead is used as a stabilizer that keeps vinyl from breaking down. The problem arises as the vinyl ages. The lead migrates out and attaches to dust, which can be inhaled or ingested. In 2008, the Michigan-based Ecology Center tested 39 samples of vinyl tile flooring and found that 74% of the tiles contained detectable levels of lead, with some samples reaching 1,900 ppm. Small children and toddlers are most at risk because they are crawling and putting things in their mouths. Children 0—6 years of age absorb up to 50% more lead when ingested than do adults, so it is important to reduce all lead exposures you can.



What can you do? Consider renovations, particularly if you have young children who crawl around on floors in your home. Linoleum, cork, bamboo, and hardwood flooring all tested free of lead in the Ecology Center's tests, and even vinyl sheet flooring, as opposed to individual tiles, was relatively free of lead (just 2% of 731 samples tested contained lead in it.)

Knowing where to look for lead in your home can help keep you and your loved ones safe and lead free. If you have any questions concerning lead in your home, call the Lead Education and Abatement Program at 406-457-8583.

This article was provided by Rodale News.

<http://www.ewg.org/report/ewgs-water-filter-buying-guide>

<http://www.ewg.org/skindeep/browse/lipstick>

