

Lead Contaminated Soil

Guidelines

Do you live in an older home? Have you been doing repairs to a home that has chipping or peeling exterior paint? Do you live near a busy roadway? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, you may have high levels of lead in the soil around your home. This information explains how to safely deal with lead-contaminated soil in your yard.

The Dangers of Lead

Homes near busy roadways or near fences with chipped or peeling paint sometimes have high amounts of lead in the soil. Lead can be released into the air by cars using leaded gasoline and then settle into soil or leaded paint chips can settle into soil after they fall because lead doesn't wash away.

Lead poisoning is a concern for both children and adults. It can cause:

- Permanent problems with health, learning, and behavior in young children
- High blood pressure, kidney damage, and fertility problems in adults

You can be exposed to lead any time you breathe lead dust, fumes, or swallow anything that contains lead.

About 75% of homes built before 1978 contain some lead-based paint. The older the home the more likely it is to contain lead-based paint. You should assume that any home built before 1978 contains some lead. To be sure make sure to test your home.

Before You Begin

- Determine the best way to deal with the lead-contaminated soil in your yard. Consider drainage patterns, erosion patterns, shade patterns, and patterns of use, including "high traffic" areas used for play and other activities. This will affect which methods and ground coverings you use.

- Dampen the soil you will be working with to keep down the dust.
- Place washable rugs at the entrances of your home, to prevent tracking of lead dust and soil inside.

On the Job

Creating Safe Play Areas

Children should not play on bare soil, since it may be contaminated with lead. This soil and lead dust can easily get on children's hands and toys, and then into their mouths.

1. Set up a sandbox as a safe play area.
 - Buy fresh sand from a building supply or landscape supply company. Sand from a demolition site could be contaminated with lead.
 - Cover the sandbox when it is not being used. This will protect the sand from animals, and from contamination with lead paint chips and dust.
2. Have children play in grassy areas of the yard, or where there is other appropriate ground cover.
3. If the grass under a swing set wears away, cover the area with sand. This provides a soft landing for falls, and prevents children from kicking up contaminated soil when their feet drag under the swing.
4. Play areas should always be located away from buildings and fences with chipping or peeling paint.

Gardens

Many families have an area of open soil in their yard for flower and vegetable gardens.

- Plant gardens away from your home, and other buildings or fences covered with chipping or peeling paint that may be a source of lead.



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- If you plant in these areas, till the soil to a depth of four to six inches, and cover with uncontaminated soil.
- Wear protective gloves when gardening and landscaping, and wash your hands thoroughly afterward.
- Try to keep children out of the garden.
- Thoroughly wash any vegetables or fruit you plan on eating from your garden.
- If you think the soil in your garden might be contaminated with lead, remove the outer leaves of leafy vegetables, peel all root vegetables, and wash the produce thoroughly.

Covering Bare Soil

Bare soil is any soil that you can see. You can cover lead-contaminated soil with sand, wood chips, stone, or sod. You can also plant grass seed, but it takes longer to cover the bare area. It is also important to remember that, in Minnesota's climate, grass seed cannot be planted year-round. Always remember to "work damp" to prevent anyone from breathing in lead-contaminated dust and soil.

You should also try to find out why the soil is bare. It's possible that the area is being used as a play or work area, or to park cars. Trees may be keeping the area in constant shade. If so, sod and grass seed are probably not the best solutions. Moving a play area or parking area might be helpful. You could also cover the area with concrete or some other permanent surface. Placing three to four inches of wood chips, mulch, sand or other ground cover is another way to cover these bare surfaces. Planting shrubs near buildings can also help prevent children from playing in bare soil.

Wearing Away of Soil onto Hard Surfaces

Don't let lead-contaminated soil blow or collect on decks, patios, sidewalks, or other hard surfaces. If your yard slopes toward a hard surface, lowering the angle of the slope is one way to solve this problem. Laying sod, landscaping the area with plants or mulch, or building a retaining wall will also help keep soil in place.

How Do I get More Information?

For more information about lead please contact the Lead Program at the Minnesota Department of Health. You can call us at (651) 201-4620, visit our website at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/lead>, or write us at the address listed on the front of this fact sheet.

Lead is a risk for both you and your family. Be informed. Be safe.