

Who should be tested?

- > Babies and Pre-school children should have regular tests as they are at increased risk of elevated blood lead levels
- > Pregnant women and women planning a pregnancy should be tested as blood lead levels are passed on from the mother to their unborn baby.

Where can a blood lead test be taken?

Environmental Health Centre

An appointment can be made by phoning 8638 4100 or calling into the Centre.

IMVS

Pregnant women who have routine blood tests at the IMVS may request extra blood be taken for lead analysis.

The Environmental Health Centre provides services free of charge.

For more information

Environmental Health Centre
117 Gertrude Street
PORT PIRIE SA 5540
Telephone: 8638 4100
www.health.sa.gov.au
www.pirie.sa.gov.au
www.pprhs.sa.gov.au

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call The Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

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Information about Lead



Environmental
Health Centre

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Lead

What is Lead?

Lead is a heavy metal, it is used in batteries, cables, welding materials and solder. It is not an alloy but is still used in the manufacture of alloys and chemicals. Lead is still used in pottery glazes and some paints. Lead is not used in the manufacture of pencils, so sucking or chewing pencils will not release lead into your system. Some water pipes in older homes are made from lead or soldered together with lead solder.

How does Lead get into your body?

The lead in our blood comes from the lead in our environment. Lead can be taken into our body with the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe.

Lead gets into the environment through lead mining and smelting, lead in old paint and some soils.

In Port Pirie lead contaminated house dust is the major source of exposure to young children. Lead settles on houses and is washed into rainwater tanks. Around the home it can be blown in from outside, or fall through cracks in the ceiling. If children are playing in dirt and dust outside, lead on their hands or under their fingernails can get into the mouth and be swallowed.

What happens when lead gets into your body?

Lead effects the blood system by entering the blood stream first and attaching itself to the red blood cells. It is carried around the body by the red blood cells. Even small amounts of lead can interfere with the normal function of these red blood cells which carry oxygen to all parts of the body.

Lead also effects the bones and the nervous system, particularly the brain.

How does Lead get out of your body?

Lead is not breathed out or sweated out through the skin. Some lead is passed through the faeces, although most lead is passed out in the urine. It is also stored in the body, especially in the bones particularly if you are not getting enough calcium in your diet. Most of the lead will be passed out of the body over a period of time. Some of the lead that is stored in the bones will re-enter the blood stream and gradually be passed out in the urine.

When the amount of lead entering the body is greater than the amount of lead being passed out of the body, elevated blood lead levels occur.



How do you know what your blood lead level is?

The only way you can tell what your blood lead level is, is by having regular blood lead tests.

As there is lead in the environment everyone will have some lead in their body. No-one will have a blood lead test result of 0 µg/dL. Knowing your blood lead level will enable you to monitor exposure and absorption of lead.

Low blood lead levels should not be interpreted as a sign that testing is no longer necessary – it only indicates current levels of lead in the body.

What does a blood lead test involve?

Blood lead tests are taken by a simple prick of the finger. The blood sample is then sent to the laboratory and analysed to determine the lead level.

Lead levels are measured in µg/dL (micrograms per decilitre).

The World Health Organisation recommends that all Australians should have a blood lead level below 10 µg/dL.