

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Making Your Home Safe

1 The Safe Home Checklist

Directions: Read the following passage, then complete “The Safe Home Checklist.” Remember that the checklist does not include everything you can do to make your home safe. It only includes some of the most important things.

For most of us, home is a haven—a place where we go to relax and feel safe. Sometimes, however, our homes can be hazardous places. Young children and the elderly, in particular, are at risk for injury in the home. Common injuries for these groups include burns, poisonings, and falls.

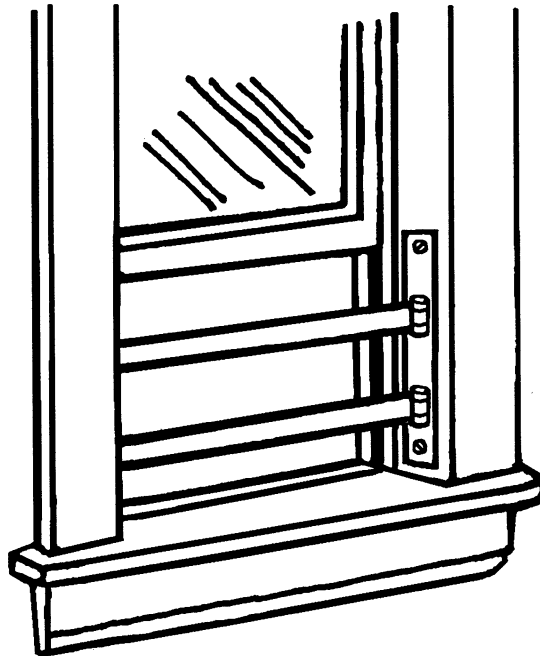
Whether we have children or not, we need to understand the hazards in our homes. Once we know what these hazards are, we can remove or reduce them and prevent injury.

To know more about home safety issues that affect you, complete The Safe Home Checklist. Read the questions below and answer each by writing “yes,” “no,” or “n/a” (not applicable) in the blank beside the question.



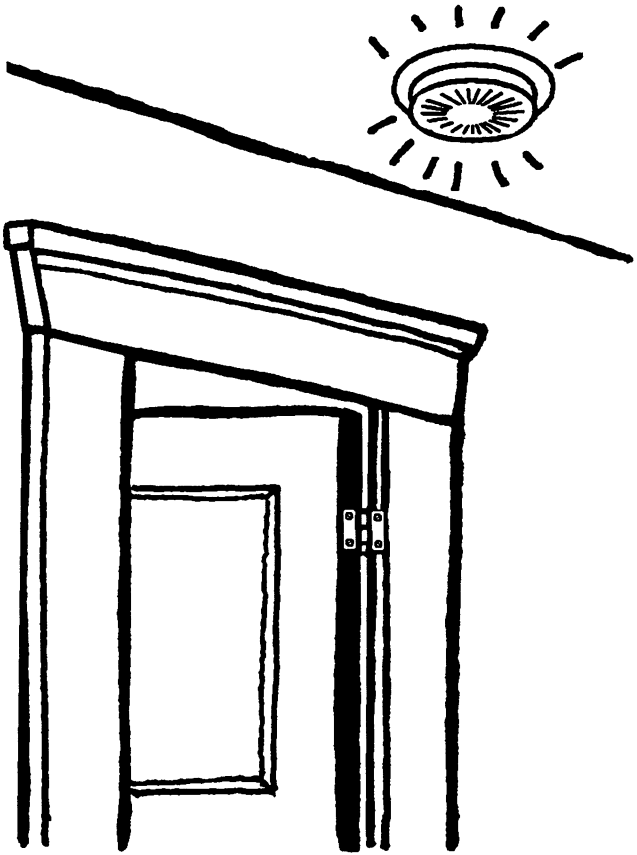
The Safe Home Checklist*

1. Do you keep hot liquids and hot foods out of your child's reach? _____
2. Do you keep cleaning supplies out of your child's reach? _____
3. Do you keep medicine and vitamins out of your child's reach? _____
4. Do you use electrical appliances (e.g., hair dryer, radio, lamps) in the bathroom? These can cause electrical shock or death if they are plugged in and fall into a tub while you or your child is in the water. Keep electrical appliances out of the bathroom or unplugged, away from water, and out of your child's reach. _____
5. Have you adjusted the hot water heater to a safe temperature? The recommended temperature is 120° F or less to prevent tap water scalds. To test the water, let it run for three minutes before measuring the temperature with a thermometer. _____
6. Does an adult always watch your child when your child is in the tub? Children can drown in a few inches of water within seconds; they can be burned by turning on hot water themselves. _____



* Adapted from "The Safe Home Checklist," the Childhood Injury Prevention Program, Vermont Department of Health, 1987.

- 7. Have you blocked windows so that your child cannot fall out? _____
- 8. Do you use toddler gates at the top and bottom of stairs to prevent falls? _____
- 9. Do your windows have screens that are secure? _____
- 10. Does your house have two unblocked exits in case of fire? _____
- 11. Are electrical cords in safe condition? For example, do not overload extension cords. _____
- 12. Are space heaters approved, in safe condition, and out of children's reach? Space heaters should be stable, with a covering, and at least three feet from curtains, papers, and furniture. _____
- 13. Are stairs, walls, railings, porches, and balconies sturdy and in good condition? For example, if wall paint is peeling, it is not in good condition. _____
- 14. Is hall and stairway lighting adequate to prevent falls? _____



15. Do you have a working smoke detector correctly placed? Attach the smoke detector to the ceiling. Put one detector on each floor, making sure you have one at the head of the stairs to the basement, at the foot of the stairs to the bedrooms, and in the hallway outside the bedrooms. Test the smoke detector monthly, replacing batteries yearly or when low. Also, consult the local fire department regarding smoke detector regulations in your state. _____
16. Do you have the local poison control center number near your phone? _____
17. Do you have a fire escape plan? _____
18. Do you keep matches and lighters out of your child's reach? _____
19. If you smoke, do you safely dispose of cigarette butts and matches? Careless smoking is a major cause of fire deaths. Put out cigarettes in a large deep ashtray, then dump everything into the toilet. Do not smoke in bed or when under the influence of alcohol or medication. Check stuffed furniture for cigarette butts before going to bed. _____
20. a. Do you keep firearms in your home? _____
 b. If so, do you keep them locked and out of your child's reach? _____
21. Have you tested the paint in your house for lead? Dust from lead-based paint is particularly dangerous to children. Over the years, painted surfaces crumble into household dust. The dust clings to toys, fingers, and other objects that children normally put in their mouths. This is the most common way that lead gets into your child. Children also get lead into their bodies by chewing on lead painted surfaces. _____



22. Have you tested your water for lead? Test water for lead if you have water from a drinking well, pipes with lead solder, or water known to be very corrosive.

23. Have you tested your children for lead? Children between the ages of nine months and six years should be tested for lead. A blood test for lead helps individuals find out if someone has taken in too much lead before there are any outward signs of illness.

List below any changes you need to make—replacing your smoke detector, arranging a lead test, etc.

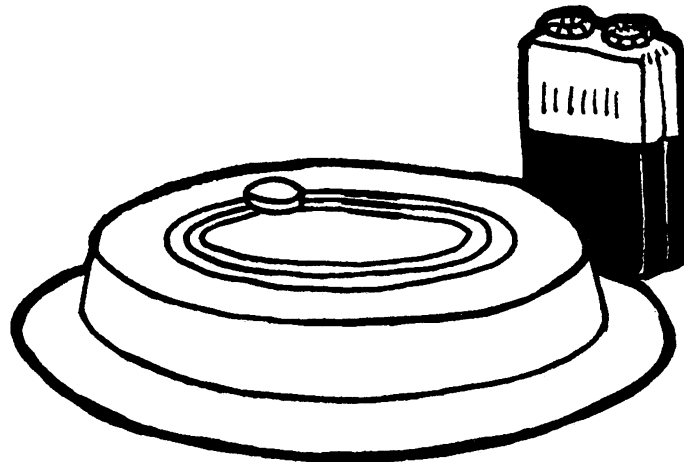


2

Vocabulary

Directions: Review the vocabulary words below and define each using simple English terms.

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|---------------------|---------------------|
| trim (n.) | railing(s) (n.) |
| stair(s) (n.) | vent(s) (n.) |
| wall(s) (n.) | floor(s) (n.) |
| porch(es) (n.) | balcony(ies) (n.) |
| bedroom (n.) | furniture (n.) |
| window(s) (n.) | bathub (n.) |
| basement (n.) | build (v.) |
| bed (n.) | door(s) (n.) |
| paint (n.) | scald (v.) |
| electrical (adj.) | burn (v.) |
| shock (v.) | medicine(s) (n.) |
| poison (v.) | screen(s) (n.) |
| vitamin(s) (n.) | reach (v.) |
| heater(s) (n.) | lead (n.) |
| dangerous (adj.) | hair dryer(s) (n.) |
| careless (adj.) | lamp(s) (n.) |
| appliance(s) (n.) | chemical(s) (n.) |
| radio(s) (n.) | firearm(s) (n.) |
| cigarette(s) (n.) | prevent (v.) |
| toy(s) (n.) | safe (adj.) |
| adjust (v.) | temperature(s) (n.) |
| screen(s) (n.) | battery(ies) (n.) |
| ashtray(s) (n.) | block (v.) |
| thermometer(s) (n.) | smoke detector (n.) |



3

Review and Discuss

Directions: Finish “The Safe Home Checklist” and answer the following questions.

1. How did you do on “The Safe Home Checklist”? _____

2. What are the greatest dangers in your home? _____

3. What could you do to make your home safer? _____

4. Why do you think the checklist includes so many items related to child safety? _____

5. If you have children, do you often worry about their safety? _____

Angela Caruso's Story

Directions: Read the following passage.

Angela Caruso rented an apartment in a two-family home located just outside the city. The house, which was built in the 1920s, was large and located on a quiet street. It was perfect for Ms. Caruso and her three children: Lisa, age 5; Paulo, age 4; and Giovanni, 1 year old. The house was also inexpensive, close to Ms. Caruso's job, and in the same neighborhood as her family.

About one year after moving into the new apartment, Ms. Caruso took Giovanni to the doctor for a routine checkup. At the checkup, Ms. Caruso explained to the doctor that she lived in an older home which contained lead paint. Ms. Caruso had learned from her new neighbors that the lead paint in the older homes crumbles into dust over the years and that the dust gets on children's toys, fingers, and other things they put in their mouths. Her neighbors also told her that some of the children in the neighborhood had lead poisoning. Knowing that Giovanni could have been exposed to lead, Ms. Caruso asked the doctor to give Giovanni a lead test as part of his checkup.

The test took only a few seconds. The lab technician took some blood from Giovanni's arm and sent the blood to the laboratory. The doctor told Ms. Caruso that he would let her know the results of the test in one week.

One week later, the doctor called Ms. Caruso and reported the results of the blood test. The blood test showed that Giovanni did not have lead poisoning. Ms. Caruso was relieved to learn that Giovanni was OK.

However, the doctor told Ms. Caruso that she should take some simple precautions to keep Giovanni and her other children safe from lead poisoning in the future. He recommended that Ms. Caruso frequently wash her children's hands and toys, mop hard floor surfaces, wash windowsills with soap and water, feed her children foods with much iron and calcium, and use only cold water or filtered water for cooking and drinking. He also suggested that Ms. Caruso make sure her children stay out of the dirt around the house because the dirt can contain lead paint chips.

The doctor asked Ms. Caruso to bring Lisa and Paulo to his office for a lead test. He said that Paulo and Lisa might also have unsafe amounts of lead in their blood. Ms. Caruso agreed.

Ms. Caruso also said that she would call the local health department and her landlord. She was very worried about her children's health and wanted to do everything she could to reduce the amount of lead in her apartment.

5

Review and Discuss

Directions: Review “Angela Caruso’s Story” and answer the following questions.

1. What do you know about lead poisoning? _____

2. Who usually gets lead poisoning? _____

3. Do you think your children are at risk for lead poisoning? _____

4. Do you know anyone who has had lead poisoning? _____

5. If you were in Ms. Caruso’s position what would you do? _____

6

Reducing Lead in Your Home

Directions: Look at the pictures below and note the different ways to protect yourself from lead in the home.

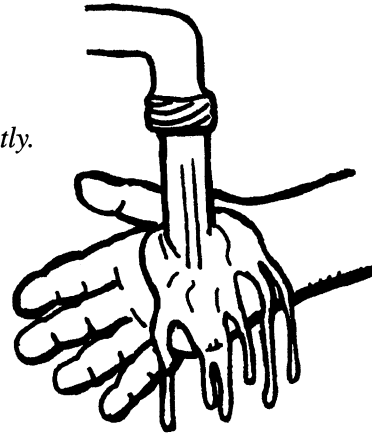
One of the greatest environmental threats to children is lead poisoning: 74 percent of all private homes built before 1978 contain some lead paint. One out of nine children under age 6 has enough lead in his or her blood to place him or her at risk. Children with high lead levels are six times more likely to have reading disabilities.*

* Sources include the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

However, there are some simple steps you can take to reduce the risk of childhood lead poisoning in your home. These are listed below.

Children's Hands and Faces

Wash children's hands and faces frequently.



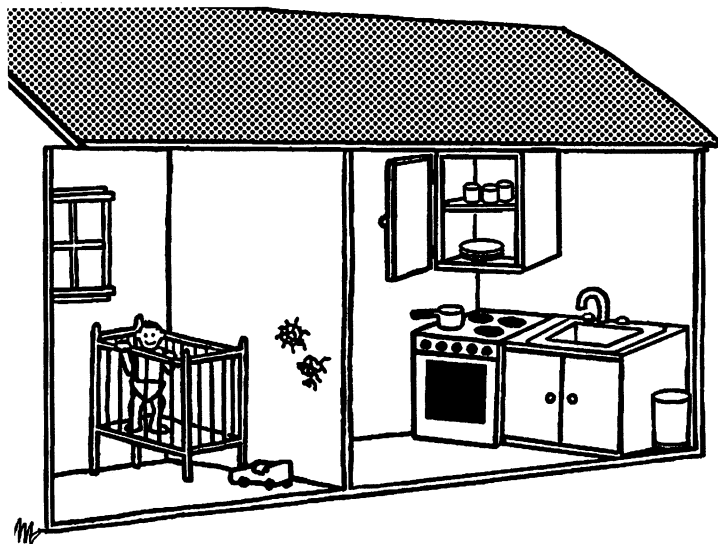
Folk Remedies



Use cautiously because they may contain lead: Alarcon, Alkohl, Asarcon, Bala Goli, coral, Ghasard, Greta, Kandü, Kohl, Luiga, Maria Luisa, Pay-Loo-Ah, Rueda.

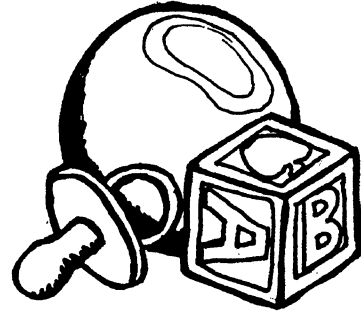
Painted Surfaces (pre-1978 homes only)

Cover peeling paint with a thick, durable material. Move cribs and playpens away from peeling paint. Have paint tested in a laboratory. If it has lead, don't scrape, sand, or burn it.



Toys

Wash toys and pacifiers frequently.



Dust (pre-1978 homes only)

Mop hard surface floors and wash windowsills and baseboards at least once a week with trisodium phosphate in water. Buy trisodium phosphate at a hardware store. Don't use mops or sponges for anything else. (Also make sure that you store the trisodium phosphate out of your child's reach. It can be poisonous if consumed.)

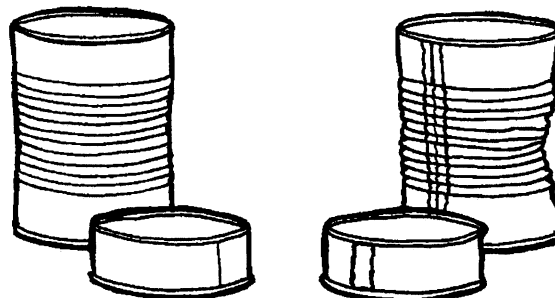


Diet

Feed children foods with much iron and calcium. Foods high in iron include liver, fish, eggs, raisins, and spinach. Foods high in calcium include milk, cheese, and yogurt.



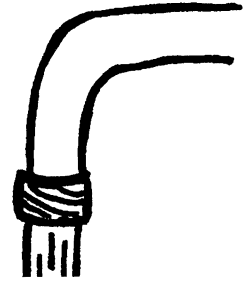
Cans



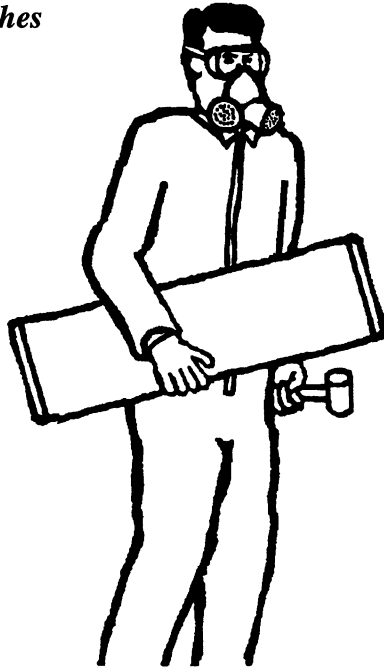
Don't store food in open cans. Don't buy cans with wide, dented seams. (Cans with no side seams or narrow seams and blue/black paint lines are lead free.)

Water

Use only cold water for drinking, making baby formula, or cooking food. Run water until it is cold. Use excess water for washing or watering plants.



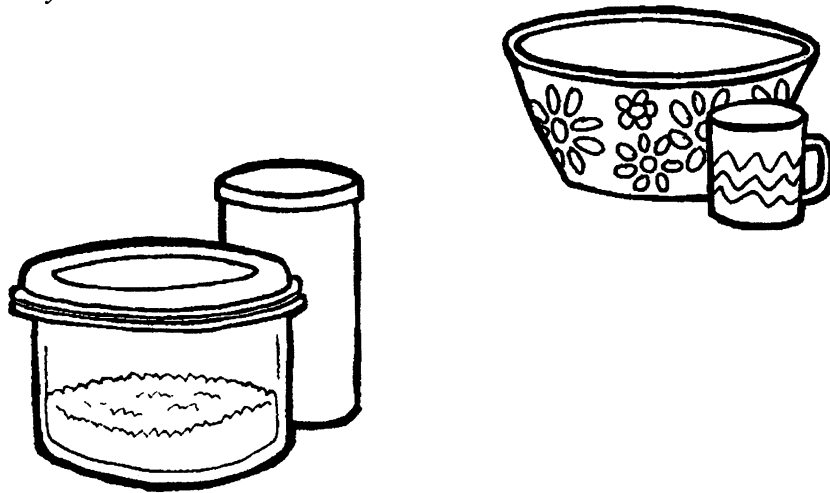
Clothes



If your work exposes you to lead, leave your clothes at work and shower before entering the house. Wash work clothes separately from the rest of the laundry. Parents who work with lead, such as renovation or contract workers, can bring home lead dust on their clothing. The dust can affect their children.

Dishes

Test dishes and mugs for lead, especially colored, imported, or handmade dishes. Store food only in unpainted glass or plastic, not in painted dishes or pottery.



7

Collect and Share Stories

Directions: Choose one of the following scenarios to write about. Bring your story to class.

- Assume that your house or apartment was built before 1978 and contains lead-based paint, and that your water also contains some lead. Describe steps you can take to reduce the risk of childhood lead poisoning in your own home. If you do not have children living in your home, describe steps you would take if you did.
- Write about a personal experience with lead poisoning. This might be something that you have experienced or something that happened among your friends or family.

