Understanding Your Child's Lead Test

The amount of lead found in a child's blood is called a blood lead level. Blood lead tests tell how many micrograms (millionth of a gram) of lead are in each deciliter (tenth of a liter) of a child's blood (µg/dL). A blood lead level will tell if a child has been exposed to lead in the last 3-4 months.

To find out how much lead is in a child's blood, a small amount of blood is taken from a child's arm, finger or heel. Taking blood from a child's finger or heel is called a finger or heel-stick or a capillary test. Sometimes the blood from a capillary test may give a false high result due to lead on the skin or in the environment (contamination). If a capillary test is ≥5 µg/dL, a venous blood lead test (from an arm vein) will need to be taken to confirm the blood lead level.

≥5 µg/dL: Public Health Action Level

If the blood was taken from your child's finger or heel, it may be at this level due to contamination. If a capillary test is above ≥5 µg/dL, a venous blood lead test will need to be taken within two weeks to confirm the blood lead level. If the test was a venous draw it MAY be a sign of recent exposure to lead. Any level ≥5 µg/dL is considered elevated. At this level no medical management is needed, but parents should take steps to identify possible sources of lead in their child's environment in order to prevent any further exposure. County health department staff will contact you to ask additional questions and to schedule a home visit to help you identify lead hazards.

There is no safe level of lead for children. Recent research has shown that lead levels at and below 5 µg/dL can lower intelligence. You should keep your child away from lead around the home and give your child healthy foods. Lead absorption decreases when there is enough iron or calcium in a child's diet. Serve foods high in calcium, iron, and vitamin C and low in fat. Your child will need a follow-up venous test in three months to determine if levels have lowered.

10-19 µg/dL

At this level, a confirmatory (venous) test will need to be taken within one week. Children with elevated blood lead levels may not look or act sick. If the lead level does not drop, children can experience permanent health problems. Sources of lead can be found in the home, school, yard or places a child frequently visits. It is important to identify and remove lead hazards. The local health department will contact you and schedule a home visit to help you identify lead hazards. Lead absorption decreases when there is enough iron or calcium in a child's diet. Serve foods high in calcium, iron, and vitamin C and low in fat. Your child will need another blood test in 3 months to see if the level of lead has lowered.

20-44 µg/dL

If a capillary test is at this level, a venous blood lead test will need to be taken within one week to confirm the blood lead level. The higher the blood lead level on the screening or capillary test, the more urgent the need for a confirmation test. A child with a confirmed venous draw in this range has a high lead level and needs to be seen by a doctor or health care provider for a medical exam. Sources of lead can be found in the home, school, yard or places a child frequently visits. The county health department will contact you and schedule a home visit to identify lead hazards. Lead hazards must be found and reduced as quickly as possible. Lead absorption decreases when there is enough iron or calcium in a child's diet. Serve foods high in calcium, iron, and vitamin C and low in fat.

The child's medical provider should be involved in helping bring this blood lead level down by managing the child's diet and providing vitamin supplements if needed. Your child will need another blood test in one month to see if the level of lead has lowered.

Above 45 µg/dL

If a capillary test is at this level, a venous blood lead test will need to be taken immediately or within 48 hours to confirm the blood lead level. The higher the blood lead level on the screening or capillary test, the more urgent the need for a confirmation test. A child with a confirmed venous draw in this range has a dangerous lead level and will need medical treatment. The child's medical provider should be involved in helping bring this blood lead level down by managing the child's diet and providing chelation therapy. Very high levels of lead can damage the brain and kidneys. Lead hazards in the child's environment must be found and eliminated. Your child will need regular medical follow-up and re-testing to see if the level of lead has lowered.

Protect Your Child From Lead

Oregon Health Authority

No matter what the level of lead in your child's blood, you should:

- Learn about lead and its effects on children
- Keep children away from lead around your home
- Wash children's hands, pacifiers, and toys often to remove lead dust
- Give your child healthy food that will help protect their bodies from lead
- Talk to your medical provider about the next time your child should have a lead test
- Learn more about how to prevent lead poisoning by calling:
  - **The Leadline 503-988-4000 (Portland Metro Area)**

    1-800-368-5060 Statewide
- Visit healthoregon.org/lead for more information