

Lead Safe Fact sheet

Lead in ceiling dust

Lead and your health

Because lead is cheap and useful, it is found in many products and in many places in the environment.

Lead can affect anybody, but children under the age of four and pregnant women are most at risk. Lead can affect children by causing learning and attention problems, hearing loss, slowed growth and behaviour problems.

Lead can affect adults too. Low levels of exposure can cause joint and muscle pain, high blood pressure and infertility. Higher levels can cause memory loss, nerve problems and, at very high levels, fits.

Lead gets into our bodies when we breathe in lead dust and fumes in air, or if we eat food or drink water that contains lead. Children can rapidly pick up lead through normal hand-to-mouth activity. Small amounts can gradually build up in the body and cause health problems.

Where does lead dust come from?

Many older Australian homes and buildings have lead dust in their ceiling cavities, in wall cavities and under the floor. This dust has built up over many years from many sources, including renovations in your home or nearby industrial pollution, exhaust from cars using leaded petrol, and fumes from burning wood or coal. The breakdown of old lead paint is an important source of dust in pre-1970 houses.

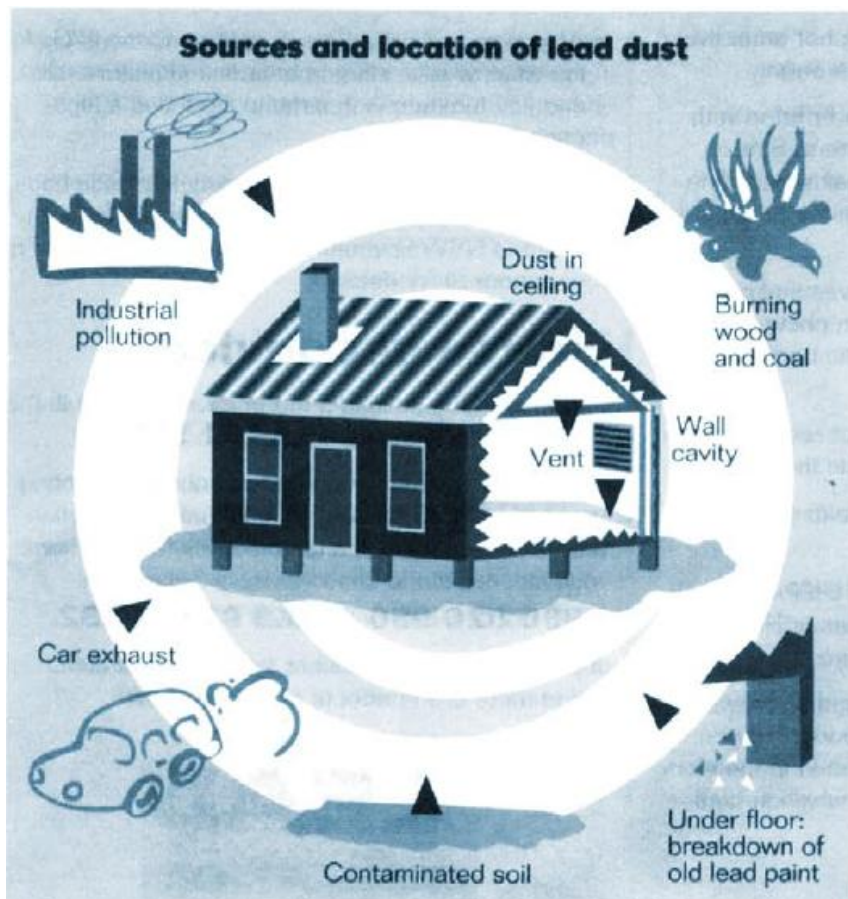
How dust can contaminate your house

The dust in your roof void does not pose a risk if ceilings, cornices and ceiling roses are in good repair. In fact, the dust is better left untouched if there is no leakage into living spaces.

Some home maintenance or renovation activities may disturb dust and increase the risk of contaminating your living areas. These include:

- Demolishing ceilings or cavity walls
- Adding a second-story extension
- Putting in an attic ladder or skylight
- Installing insulation or new electrical wiring
- Working in the ceiling cavity for any reason.

Black trails of dust near cracks or cornices are trouble signs. Decorative ceiling roses with air vents can also let dust in. Water damage may cause ceilings to crack or collapse.



What to do

Test the dust for lead

Assume dust in pre-1970 houses contains lead unless tests prove otherwise. To be sure, hire a professional lead assessor or carefully collect samples yourself and have them tested by a laboratory (see 'How to get advice', below)

Have lead dust removed from your house

Pregnant women, children and pets should move out until the clean-up is finished or stay away from the work area.

Do-it-yourself ceiling dust removal is not recommended – it's dirty and dangerous and requires special equipment. Hire a professional (see 'How to get advice', below).

If you do remove the dust yourself. do it safely

Take precautions to ensure dust does not enter living areas through the access hole into the ceiling.

Wear an AS-I716-approved respirator Fitted with P1 (dust) or P2 (dust and fumes) filters. Simple paper masks offer no protection against very fine dust. Follow manufacturer's instructions to ensure the mask fits properly.

- Wear protective clothing (long sleeves and pants) that does not catch dust or flakes in pockets or cuffs, Disposable overalls and plastic boot covers are a good idea.
- Lay plastic under the access hole and cover or move soft furnishings, carpets, curtains etc in the room.
- Watch out for electrical wires and take care not to fall through the ceiling.
- Use a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) vacuum cleaner. not a domestic vacuum cleaner. HEPA vacuum cleaners are available for hire.
- Wash hands and face before meals, and shower and change clothes when you finish work, if you smoke, don't smoke or carry cigarettes in the work area, as you can breathe in lead dust which settles



on them. Wash hands before smoking to stop lead entering your mouth,

Wash work clothes separately from all other clothes using a phosphate detergent (e.g., liquid sugar soap). Rinse the washing machine afterwards

- After you've finished. wipe all hard surfaces (including window sills, skirting boards and picture rails) and any furniture with a damp cloth and a high phosphate detergent.
- Seal the collected dust in heavy-duty plastic bags.
- Dispose of the bags at a approved waste Facility (call the NSW Environment Protection Authority or your council for details).

How to get advice

For information on lead and the environment call the NSW EPA's Pollution line on **131 555**.

For further information and advice about protecting yourself from lead. about qualified paint Inspection and removal services, and guidelines for safe home renovation, call the Global Lead Advice & Support Service on:

1800 626 086 or (02) 9716 0132.

Ask your doctor if you want to know more about blood tests or the effects of lead on health.