Lead – Protect Yourself from Lead Exposure Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Lead exposure doesn't always hit fast – but it hits hard. Whether you're working in construction, painting, plumbing, demolition, or renovation, lead can quietly build up in your body over time. You might not feel it right away, but even small amounts can cause serious long-term health problems like kidney damage, high blood pressure, nerve disorders, or memory loss. And the worst part? You could be bringing that risk home on your clothes, boots, or tools – putting your family at risk too. Protecting yourself from lead isn't just about staying safe at work – it's about protecting your future and the people who count on you.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Lead is a toxic metal that can enter your body without you even realizing it – and once it's there, it builds up over time. You don't have to ingest a lot all at once for it to cause damage. The danger is especially high in older buildings, industrial work, and renovation jobs where lead-based paint, dust, or contaminated materials are disturbed.

Inhalation of Lead Dust – The Silent Threat: Cutting, grinding, sanding, or demolishing materials that contain lead creates fine dust particles you can't always see. Breathing this in allows lead to enter your lungs and bloodstream directly, causing damage to your brain, kidneys, and other organs.

- High-risk tasks: torch-cutting pipes, removing lead paint, tearing out old windows or drywall
- You may not feel sick immediately, but repeated exposure builds up over time

Skin and Surface Contamination – Lead Travels Easily: Lead particles settle on your skin, clothing, gloves, tools, and surfaces. Without proper decontamination, you can accidentally transfer lead from the jobsite to your lunch, your vehicle, or your home.

- Lead doesn't wash off easily with water alone
- You can poison yourself by eating or drinking with contaminated hands or

gear

Bringing Lead Home – Family Exposure: If you leave work wearing contaminated clothing or boots, you may unknowingly bring lead dust into your car and home. Children are especially vulnerable – even tiny amounts of lead can damage their developing brains and nervous systems.

- Laundry cross-contamination is a major risk
- Even wiping your face with a contaminated glove can put you and your family at risk

Long-Term Health Effects – Damage That Adds Up: Lead exposure can affect nearly every system in the body. It's especially harmful to the brain, heart, kidneys, and reproductive system. The scary part is that many symptoms appear only after long-term damage has already occurred.

- Headaches, mood swings, memory loss
- Fertility issues, nerve damage, muscle weakness
- Increased risk of miscarriage and birth defects

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Protecting yourself from lead exposure takes more than just common sense – it takes the right gear, clean habits, and knowing how lead travels. You can't see it, smell it, or feel it, but it sticks to everything. Here's how to keep it out of your body – and out of your home:

Wear the Right PPE – Block It Before It Reaches You

Use NIOSH-approved respirators (with P100 filters or as specified by your safety plan) when cutting, sanding, or disturbing lead-containing materials. Wear disposable or washable coveralls, gloves, and boot covers. Never reuse contaminated clothing without proper laundering.

Example: If you're grinding lead-painted surfaces and your sleeves don't cover your wrists, stop and switch to a suit with full coverage. That small exposed area can absorb dust all day.

Wash Up Before You Eat, Drink, or Smoke

Never eat, drink, or smoke on the job site – especially with dirty hands. Always wash hands and face with lead-removal soap before breaks and at the end of your shift. Lead can be swallowed without you even realizing it if it's on your hands, tools, or face.

Use Wet Methods and HEPA-Filtered Tools – Keep Dust Down

Dry sanding, scraping, or demolition spreads lead dust fast. Use wet methods when disturbing painted surfaces, and always use HEPA vacuums or tools with HEPA-filtered attachments to control airborne dust. Never use compressed air to clean lead dust off surfaces or clothing – it just blows it back into the air.

Keep Work and Personal Spaces Separate

Change out of contaminated gear before entering your car or home. Store dirty

clothing in sealed bags or designated bins until it can be laundered properly — and never wash work gear with household laundry. Use on-site changing areas or designated wash stations if available.

Clean Up Properly — Don’t Spread It Around

Use HEPA vacuums, disposable wipes, or wet mops to clean surfaces — not brooms or dry cloths. Those just kick the dust back into the air. Designate certain areas for lead work, and never use personal items (phones, headphones, tools) while wearing contaminated gear.

Get Blood Lead Testing — Know Where You Stand

If you work regularly around lead, you should receive regular blood lead level (BLL) testing as part of your employer’s medical surveillance program. This helps detect exposure early — often before symptoms start.

Read Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and Follow the Rules

Know what materials you’re working with. If the job involves lead-based paint, pipes, solder, or old infrastructure, read the SDS and follow all hazard controls, including what PPE is required. Employers are legally required to train you — and you have the right to know.

FINAL WORD

Lead exposure doesn’t happen all at once — it builds up quietly and causes damage you might not notice until it’s too late.
