

MEDIA RELEASE

OPHA cautions drinking water is not the only source of lead in the home

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Toronto, June 20, 2007 – On the heels of recent results on lead in drinking water in 36 Ontario communities, the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) cautions the public that there are numerous sources of lead in and around the home, including paint, soil, consumer products and toys.

“Older homes with lead-based paint, soil and consumer products continue to be a significant source of lead exposure for children,” said OPHA President Dr. Garry Aslanyan. “Exposure to lead could affect as many as 1 in 5 children, but we don’t know the full extent of the problem because this issue has been understudied.”

Approximately 25 per cent of Canadian children live in homes built before 1960, during which time lead levels in paint could be as high as 50 percent by weight.

In children with high blood lead levels, lead is usually traced back to household paint and dust. Lead dust is created when older, lead-based paint is disturbed. Lead exposure can lead to anaemia, central nervous system damage, impaired mental function and behavioural problems. Even small amounts of lead can be harmful, especially to infants, young children and pregnant women.

The following steps can be taken to help reduce the risk of exposure to those living in older homes:

- If you have not used the water in your home for six hours, it is recommended to run the cold water tap until the water feels cold to touch. This could take up to five minutes;
- Use only water from the cold water faucet for drinking and cooking;
- Encourage children to wash their hands before every meal and after playing outside;
- Teach family members to remove outside footwear at the door before entering to avoid tracking in soil;
- Damp mop and damp dust furniture and floors weekly.

Renovating, which includes sanding painted surfaces, removing trim or wallpaper or even drilling a hole into a lead-painted wall, can create enough lead-contaminated dust to seriously harm a child. Seek expert advice before disturbing any surface that could contain lead. When renovating:

- Never power sand, dry scrape or remove paint with a heat gun as these activities generate hazardous amounts of lead dust.
- Pregnant women and children should stay out of areas that are being renovated and should not enter the space until the work is complete and has been well-cleaned.
- Personal protective equipment (e.g. masks, gloves) should be worn.
- Clean up carefully:
 - Roll up or fold plastic sheets to catch dust and chips.
 - Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter to clean all floors and other surfaces.
 - Wash floors, walls and sills with detergent and rinse with fresh water.
 - Throw out all trash, towels and plastic sheets in heavy plastic bags.
 - Clean or remove shoes to avoid tracking lead dust around your home.

For more information:

If you are worried about lead in your drinking water, contact your local public health unit to find out about water testing. Many municipalities are providing this service for residents free of charge.

OPHA's position paper on lead in housing can be viewed at www.opha.on.ca.

The OPHA is a partner of the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment (CPCHE). More information can be found at CPCHE's website www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca and on Toronto Public Health's site: www.toronto.ca/health/hphe/pdf/hidden_exposures_lead.pdf

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