



Don't Spread Lead

A do-it-yourselfer's guide to preventing lead poisoning by working lead-safe

Script¹

Hello. I'm Norm Abram.

Are you getting ready to fix up an older home? Did you know that homes built before 1978 may contain lead paint? If you do repairs or renovations without proper precautions, you could put yourself and your family at risk for lead poisoning, a very serious illness.

The program you're about to see will show you simple methods to work lead-safe. These methods are called the five steps to lead safety.

I'll be back at the end of the program. In the meanwhile, I hope you'll pay close attention to the ways you can protect your family, yourself, and your community from lead poisoning.

If you're watching this program, you're probably thinking about fixing up a house. Maybe you're painting a room for a new baby or repairing a door that sticks.

You may be doing the work yourself, or you may be hiring a contractor.

This program explains how to handle small repairs or renovations safely. If you are doing major repairs or renovations that may create a lot of dust—jobs like replacing windows—consider taking a training course in lead-safe work practices or hiring a contractor who has taken this training.

If your house was built before 1978, it might have been painted with lead paint. If it was built before 1960, it probably does contain lead paint, especially on the doors, windows, trim, stairways, railings, and porches.

¹ This video was developed for do-it-yourselfers. It is not intended for paid contractors, renovators, maintenance workers, painters, and other tradespeople.

Paid contractors who are renovating, repairing, or painting homes, child-care facilities, and many schools that were built before 1978 must comply with a rule issued by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Renovation, Repair and Painting Rule of 2008 (RRP) requires these contractors to use specific lead-safe work practices. The practices are similar to the ones described in this video for do-it-yourselfers but have more detailed requirements. If you are hiring a contractor, make sure that the contractor knows about this EPA rule and will follow its requirements.

The RRP now also requires that owners and managers of rental properties follow the same lead-safety requirements that apply to paid contractors.

For more information about the rule, see www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/renovation.htm.

If that old lead paint is in good condition and you won't be disturbing it, it shouldn't be a problem. But if you'll be sanding, scraping, or otherwise disturbing the paint, you'll almost certainly create dust and debris that contain lead.

And that can be dangerous. People may breathe in or swallow the dust and become lead poisoned. Small children may also swallow paint chips and become lead poisoned.

Lead poisoning can make people really sick. It is especially dangerous to babies and young children, because lead can harm their brains, hearing, and growth. It can cause very serious learning and behavior problems. And once the harm is done, it is permanent.

Lead can also harm unborn babies and can cause serious health problems in adults.

Lead can be dangerous, but you can work safely around lead paint if you follow some simple precautions. If you're hiring a contractor, make sure that he or she knows and agrees to follow these precautions too.

We'll call these precautions the five steps to lead safety, and we'll explain them in this program.

Right about now, you might be wondering if your house actually contains lead paint.

Remember, lead paint might be present in any house built before 1978.

So, if your house was built before 1978, you might decide to have it tested for lead paint. A certified lead inspector or lead inspector risk assessor should do the testing. Although you can have just the work area tested, it's usually better to have the entire house inspected and tested. Then you will know how to handle future painting and renovation projects.

But if testing isn't possible or practical, use this safety principle:

If your house was built before 1978, assume that lead paint is present, and follow the five steps to lead safety.

The first step to working lead-safe is to protect your family, your neighbors, any tenants you might have, and yourself.

It's very important to keep all children and pregnant women out of the work area and away from dangerous lead dust. In fact, keep everyone who is not doing the work out of the area. Because lead is especially dangerous to unborn babies, pregnant women should not do any work around lead paint.

Keep pets away from the area, too. Not only can pets get poisoned, but they can also track lead dust all over the house – creating a danger for your family.

Tell your tenants where and when the work will take place. Ask them to stay away from the work area and explain why.

Put up a sign and a barrier, such as yellow tape, to remind your tenants to stay away from the work area. Make sure that the sign is in English and, if necessary, in their own language.

If you're working outside, close to another home, ask your neighbors to close their windows and doors. Explain that doing so will help protect them from lead poisoning.

Here's a special note if you're a property owner or property manager, or if you're a contractor or any other person who is being paid to maintain, repair, or renovate a home that was built before 1978. A federal law requires you to give to owners and occupants a booklet called *Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home* before you start this work. Ask them to sign a receipt for the booklet. Explain the type of work, and where and when it will be done.

And if the owners or occupants don't speak or read English, check the website of the Environmental Protection Agency for a version of the booklet in their own language.

This brings us to the second step to working lead-safe—preparing the work area.

It's usually a good idea to work on one room at a time.

After you've made sure that everyone except for the workers is out of the work area, you'll need to protect the belongings.

For a small project, move furniture, rugs, curtains, clothing, toys, foods, and other movable items away from the work area. For example, if you're going to paint a window, take down the curtains and push the furniture away from the window. For a larger project, such as painting a room, you can move everything out of the room or move everything to the center of the room.

You need enough protected work area for you, your tools, and any surfaces that you are working on.

As you prepare to work, put all of the equipment and supplies in the room where you'll be working.

For example, you'll need heavy-duty plastic sheeting and waste bags, duct tape, spray bottles, wet sanding blocks, and other tools necessary for the work you're doing.

Now you need to seal off the work area to prevent dust from spreading into clean areas of the house while you're working. Cover the floor, counters, air vents, built-ins, carpeting, and any household items that you couldn't remove. Use heavy-duty plastic sheeting as a cover, and secure all the plastic with duct tape. Plastic sheeting is cheaper than drop cloths, and you'll need to throw away the covering after the job to avoid spreading lead dust to the next job.

If you're working inside, shut down forced air heating and ventilation systems. Next, close all windows and doors to keep dust from spreading.

Then, put all the tools and supplies you'll need on the plastic sheeting, so you don't have to walk away from the work area with dust on your shoes to get what you need.

One special piece of equipment that you may need is a vacuum with a HEPA filter. A HEPA filter traps even very tiny particles of dust and keeps that dust from getting into the air.

If you're working outside, follow the same general procedure.

If there are any items that cannot be moved away from the work area, cover them with plastic sheeting and seal with duct tape. Cover the ground with plastic sheeting, too, and secure the sheeting.

If you need to use a ladder outside, cut small slits in the plastic so the ladder doesn't slip.

Now you're ready for step three: protecting yourself from lead poisoning by protecting yourself from lead dust and debris.

You can start by putting on safety equipment, such as

- Safety glasses
- Disposable gloves
- A disposable hat
- Disposable shoe covers
- Disposable coveralls

If you think that the work will be very dusty, wear a respirator labeled N-100.

Don't eat, drink, or smoke in the work area. And don't apply cosmetics – even lip balm. If there's any lead dust in the work area or on your hands, these activities could carry lead into your body.

As you begin work, remember these two themes: work wet and work clean.

Working wet helps keep any dust that is created from getting into the air and then spreading.

Here's how to work wet:

If you're scraping, sanding, prying, sawing, drilling, or removing any painted materials, lightly mist the surfaces you're working on with water from a spray bottle. Repeat the misting frequently, to keep the surface constantly damp, but not soaked.

But remember: never spray water around electrical outlets, switches, or equipment.

Working clean means creating as little dust as possible and containing any dust and debris that you do create.

For example, if you create dust or debris by wet sanding or scraping, clean up immediately. Use a damp rag or tack cloth to clean up, and then put the debris in a waste bag. Don't leave dust or debris lying around.

Once work has begun, avoid tracking lead dust out of the work area.

You may need to leave the work area—for example, to eat, drink, or use the bathroom. Before you step off the plastic sheeting, remove and discard your disposable gear, such as shoe covers and coveralls. If you are not wearing protective gear, wipe your shoes carefully and use a vacuum with a HEPA filter to remove dust from your clothing.

Then thoroughly wash your hands and face.

To work clean, you must avoid unsafe practices—any activity that could create a lot of dust and spread it around.

Never remove paint by:

- dry scraping or dry sanding
- power sanding or grinding without a HEPA dust collection system to trap tiny dust particles
- using a high-temperature heat gun or an open-flame torch
- uncontained power washing
- uncontained abrasive blasting

Also never use:

- a broom to clean up

All of these methods can spread dangerous lead dust.

Finally, do not use chemical paint strippers that contain methylene chloride, because that chemical causes cancer

Once the work is complete, you'll need to clean up carefully. Cleanup is very important on jobs involving lead paint.

Because lead dust sticks to surfaces, cleaning up lead dust takes a bit of extra effort. However, if you've prepared the work area as suggested, lead-safe cleanup may be fairly easy—not much more difficult than a careful cleanup after any other job.

Remember: By cleaning up lead-safe, you'll be protecting your family, your neighbors, your tenants, and yourself from lead poisoning.

First, pick up any big pieces of debris. Put them in a heavy-duty plastic bag, and seal the bag with duct tape.

Next, fold the plastic sheeting with the dirty side inward, and place it in another heavy-duty bag. As before, seal the bag with duct tape, and store it in a safe, secure location, away from your family, your neighbors, and your tenants.

Then, depending on the job, you may use a special vacuum called a HEPA vacuum. Always use a HEPA vacuum after a project that creates a lot of dust.

Vacuum slowly and carefully, to be sure to clean up any remaining dust. Never use a broom, which can spread a lot of dust.

Next, you'll need to wash walls, floors, and other hard surfaces in the work area. Wash from the top down, and scrub hard. For large projects, wash all surfaces, whether you worked on them or not.

You'll need two buckets: one with water and detergent and another with clean rinse water. Be sure to rinse well. Change your rinse water often.

When you finish washing, put all of your dirty rags and mop heads in a heavy-duty plastic bag, and seal the bag with duct tape. You may need to double-bag the waste to keep the bags from breaking. This waste should also be stored in a safe location, away from your family, tenants, and neighbors.

Finally, clean thoroughly with the HEPA vacuum one more time.

Now, let's talk about safely disposing of the waste from your project.

Before you start your repairs or renovations, check with your state and local public health and environmental protection agencies to learn how you should dispose of the waste you create.

Handle all the bagged waste carefully, to avoid tearing the plastic bags and contaminating the property. Remove all waste from your home at the end of the project.

If you use your personal vehicle to dispose of the waste, put it in the cargo area—such as the car trunk—not the passenger area. After you've disposed of the waste, HEPA vacuum the trunk.

After you've cleaned up the work area, you'll need to clean yourself up so that you don't spread any lead dust to the rest of your home, your vehicle, or your neighborhood.

Remember: Before you leave the work area, remove all of your protective clothing—such as disposable coveralls and shoe covers. Put these items in a heavy-duty plastic bag and seal the bag with duct tape.

As soon as you leave the work area, wash your hands and face.

When you have finished working for the day, remember that lead dust may be on your clothes and your body. Remove your work clothes and wash them separately from the rest of your laundry

Then, shower and wash your hair as soon as possible.

Once your repair or renovation work is completed, it's a good idea to check your work.

First, look for paint chips, dust, and debris remaining in the work area. If you find any of these materials, clean the area again.

Next, you can take some dust wipe samples and send them to an approved lab, where they will be tested for lead. Check with your health department for a list of approved labs in your area.

If the lab finds too much lead, you'll have to clean the area all over again. That's another good reason to clean very carefully the first time!

Remember—at the beginning of this program, we explained that lead is particularly dangerous to babies, young children, and pregnant women. They should not be in or near the work area.

And, if you're working on a baby's or a young child's room, be especially careful to work safely and to clean up thoroughly. Your child's future could depend on it.

Now, let's quickly review the five major steps to working lead-safe:

1. Protect your family, your neighbors, your tenants, and yourself.
2. Prepare the work area.
3. Protect yourself from dust and debris.
4. Work wet.
5. Work clean.

For more information about working lead-safe, you can get a copy of *Lead Paint Safety: A Field Guide for Painting, Home Maintenance, and Renovation Work*. Or you can take a lead-safe work practices training course approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

If you have any questions, check with your state's department of public health.

Well, there you have it – how to work lead-safe in an older home. It's not all that difficult, and it is very important. By taking a few simple precautions, you can do a great, safe job of fixing up a home.

By working lead safe, you'll be helping your family, yourself, and your community.

Thanks for your time, and good luck on your project.

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For more information, see

www.hud.gov/healthyhomes

www.epa.gov/lead

www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/lead.htm

www.dph.state.ct.us/BRS/Lead/lead_program.htm

To download a copy of *Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home*, in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian, Arabic, and Somali, go to www.epa.gov/lead/leadprot.htm. To request print copies of English and Spanish, go to www.epa.gov/opptintr/lead/nlicdocs.htm#remodel or call 1-800-424-LEAD.

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