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**OCTOBER 20-26 IS NATIONAL LEAD POISONING  
PREVENTION WEEK**

*Learn how to keep yourself and your keiki safe from lead exposure*

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HONOLULU — Lead is a toxic metal that is dangerous to health at all ages and there is no safe level of lead in the blood for children. Oct. 20 to 26 is [National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week](#) and this year's theme is "Bright Futures Begin Lead-Free." This observation provides an opportunity to learn how to protect your keiki and yourself from exposure to lead and its serious health effects.

Lead is often present in the paint of older buildings constructed prior to 1978 and can be found in soil, house dust, old toys, jewelry, antiques, souvenirs, fishing tackle, keys, dishes, food, spices, tobacco products and water. Certain work or hobbies can expose you to lead and you can also bring it home on your clothes, shoes, hair and other items.

Public water systems in Hawai'i do not historically have lead contamination; however, it is possible for lead to contaminate drinking water through fixtures and piping in older buildings. In a [collaborative project](#) funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Hawai'i Departments of Health (DOH), Education and Human Services tested drinking water taps for lead in schools and childcare centers and are continuing work to ensure lead is no longer present in taps that showed five parts per billion lead or higher.

“Keiki are especially susceptible to the effects of lead exposure because they are still in the developmental stages, which can impact both mental and physical development,” said Dr. Ruben Frescas, chief of the DOH Children with Special Health Needs Branch. “They can be exposed to sources of lead in their everyday environment at home and anywhere they play or receive care. With young children who like to play on the ground and put their hands or other objects in their mouths, lead exposure can place these younger keiki at an even higher risk for swallowing lead.”

In children, lead can cause learning and behavior problems that can result in long-term negative effects throughout adulthood like increased delinquency, lower educational attainment and lower income. In pregnant people, lead can damage a developing baby's nervous system and has the potential to cause miscarriages and stillbirths. Children tend to show signs of severe lead toxicity at lower exposure levels than adults. However, most children with lead in their blood have no obvious symptoms.

In adults, exposure to high levels of lead may cause serious health problems like anemia, kidney and brain damage, infertility in men and women, cancer, nerve and hearing damage, and heart disease. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the risk of dying from a heart attack or stroke is two to five times higher among people with higher blood lead levels, which is comparable to the increased risk from smoking, high cholesterol and hypertension.

The DOH [Hawai'i Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program \(HI-CLPPP\)](#) receives funding from the CDC to help the community prevent children from being exposed to lead; to identify children already exposed to lead so the source can be removed; and to link families to recommended services like Early Intervention and in-home residential investigations.

According to the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), children should have a [risk assessment](#) for lead exposure at well-child visits and children at increased risk should get a simple blood test for lead. [Testing](#) children at 1 and 2 years of age or later if never tested before is required and free with Med-QUEST, the Hawai'i Medicaid program. It is okay to test at other times if you or your child's doctor are concerned about lead exposure.

“Lead poisoning is completely preventable and the best way to protect children is to keep them away from lead in the environment and get screened,” Frescas said. “Taking a few simple steps today can make a big difference tomorrow and we are here to help our families take those steps.”

To learn more about how to keep yourself and your keiki safe from lead exposure, visit [lead.hawaii.gov](http://lead.hawaii.gov).

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