

## WHAT SHOULD I KNOW IF I'M BREASTFEEDING?

Breastfeeding is the natural and preferred way to feed babies. It provides benefits to mother and child and is the best feeding choice for most babies. So, mothers need to avoid the risk of lead entering their breastmilk by keeping lead out of their bodies.

Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers need more calcium in their diet than usual. If there is not enough in your blood, your body may use calcium from your bones; if lead from past exposures has been stored in your bones, this process could also make the lead from your bones move into your bloodstream and then into your breastmilk instead of calcium.

You can limit the amount of lead in your breast milk by:

- ◇ Eating a calcium-rich and balanced diet
- ◇ Reducing your own exposure to lead

All pregnant and breastfeeding women should speak with their health care provider about blood lead testing. Health care providers can provide a blood lead test for all pregnant and breastfeeding women. Results of the test should be discussed with each woman, and advice, based on the test results, should be provided.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- Contact your health care provider.
- Visit the Alaska Lead Surveillance Program website:
  - ◇ <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/eph/Pages/lead/default.aspx>
- Call or email the Alaska Environmental Public Health Program:
  - ◇ Phone: 907-269-8000
  - ◇ Email: [eph@alaska.gov](mailto:eph@alaska.gov)

**Protecting yourself from lead helps protect your baby from lead**



## LEAD EXPOSURE DURING PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING



**Protecting yourself and your baby from lead poisoning**

Alaska Department of Health and  
Social Services  
Division of Public Health  
Environmental Public Health  
Program

## WHAT IS LEAD?

Lead is a heavy metal that occurs naturally in the earth's crust. Lead can be found in the environment and in some homes and workplaces.

## WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT LEAD?

- Lead is highly toxic to humans, especially young children and developing fetuses.
- Lead can be stored for years in bones, so past lead exposure could affect health years after being exposed.
- During pregnancy and breastfeeding, lead can be passed to the fetus or to the nursing infant.
- Exposure to lead during fetal development, infancy, or early childhood can result in problems with your child's growth, behavior, and learning ability.
- Lead can also damage your cardiovascular, kidney, nervous, and reproductive systems.
- **There is no safe blood lead level in children.**



## HOW COULD I BE EXPOSED TO LEAD?

You could be exposed to lead by:

- Living in, repairing, or remodeling a home built before 1978 (lead-based paints were banned from use in housing in 1978)
- Participating in a hobby where lead is used, such as:
  - ◇ Making stained glass or jewelry with lead solder
  - ◇ Shooting or reloading firearms
  - ◇ Shooting or working at an indoor firing range
  - ◇ Casting lead bullets or fishing weights
  - ◇ Recycling metal
- Ingesting soil that contains lead
- Using, ingesting, or mouthing items that contain lead, such as imported toys and cosmetics
- Eating wild game that has been shot with lead bullets or lead shot (pellets)
- Working in an industry, such as mining, where lead particles or fumes may be in the air
- Having a family member who works in an environment with lead—lead dust can be brought into the home on shoes and clothing

## HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AND MY BABY FROM LEAD?

- Contact your health care provider about getting a lead test if you believe you have been exposed to lead.
- Test your newborn for lead if you have ever had an elevated blood lead level.
- Eat foods rich in calcium, iron, and vitamin C. This helps keep your body from absorbing lead.
- Avoid using imported traditional medicines, cosmetics, and spices that may contain lead.
- Prevent your child from eating non-food items, such as soil, clay, or paint chips.
- Ensure your dishes and cookware are lead-free.
- Take precautions—or hire an EPA-certified professional—when remodeling a home built before 1978 in order to prevent exposure to lead-based paint dust.
- Talk to your health care provider about having your child screened for lead at ages 1 and 2 years.