



Department of  
Health

# LEAD EXPOSURE

IN THE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY

Lead is a naturally occurring metal that has many hazardous health effects. Ohio's South Asian community is especially at risk for lead poisoning. While lead paint causes most cases of lead poisoning in children, other things can also contain lead, including certain South Asian amulets, cosmetics, health remedies, religious powders, and spices.

It can be difficult to know if these products contain lead because lead may not be listed on the product packaging.

Lead is dangerous and can cause:

- Learning and behavior problems in children.
- Increased blood pressure, kidney damage, and neurological problems in adults.
- Increased risk of miscarriage during pregnancy.
- Infertility and impotence.

Lead can enter your body when you:

- Eat, swallow, or mouth lead-containing products, such as amulets, health remedies, and spices.
- Put your hands in your mouth after touching products that contain lead (e.g., cosmetics and religious powders) or surfaces covered in lead dust (e.g., floors and windowsills).
- Breathe in lead dust or fumes during renovations, repairs and demolitions that disturb lead-based paint.

Take steps to protect yourself and your family from lead poisoning.



# AMULETS

People may use amulets (e.g., sheesha, tabiz, and other metal charms) for various reasons, such as speech therapy, good luck, or protection. However, amulets can contain high levels of lead.

Reduce your risk of lead exposure:

- Keep amulets away from children whenever possible.
- If your child wears an amulet, place it so they cannot put it in their mouth.
- If your child wears an amulet and puts it in their mouth, ask your child's doctor for a blood lead test.



# COSMETICS AND RELIGIOUS POWDERS

Certain cosmetics and religious powders from South Asia can contain lead. Examples include kohl, kajal, and surma (products primarily used as eyeliner but also for religious, cultural, and medicinal purposes), and sindoor (a religious powder used in Hinduism). Lead can enter your body if you touch your mouth after handling these products. Children are especially at risk because they often put their hands in their mouths. Also, some lead can get into your eyes when using kohl, kajal, and surma.

Reduce your risk of lead exposure:

- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling cosmetics and religious powders such as kohl, kajal, surma, or sindoor.
- Keep cosmetics and religious powders away from children.
- If you or your family members use these products, ask your doctor for a blood lead test.



# HEALTH REMEDIES

Some health remedies from South Asia, such as rasashastra / Ayurvedic medicines, can contain lead and other harmful metals. People may buy these products with a prescription or over the counter in the United States or abroad.

Reduce your risk of lead exposure:

- Avoid using health remedies known to contain lead and other harmful metals.
- If you or your family members are using traditional health remedies, ask your doctor for a blood lead test.



## SPICES

Spices bought in South Asian countries, especially turmeric and chili powders, can contain lead. You can be exposed to lead when you eat foods prepared with these spices.

Reduce your risk of lead exposure:

- Avoid using spices bought in South Asian countries. Buy spices locally instead.
- If you or your family members use spices purchased abroad, ask your doctor for a blood lead test.



# LEAD IN PAINT

Although lead paint has been banned since 1978, older homes may still have lead paint on walls and other surfaces. Lead dust from damaged or peeling paint can land on windowsills, floors, and toys.

When children play on the floor and put their hands and toys in their mouths, they can swallow the lead dust.

Reduce the risk of lead exposure in children:

- If you own your own home, fix chipping paint (see [Ohio Department of Health website](#) for more information).
- If you rent, report chipping paint to your landlord.
- Keep children away from repair work.
- If you are pregnant, do not participate in remodeling or repair work.
- Wash floors, windowsills, children's hands, and toys often.
- Remind your doctor to give your child a blood lead test at age 1 and 2 years, or up to age 6 if no previous test has been done.



Lead in paint also poses a risk during renovation of homes built before 1978. During renovations, repairs and demolitions that disturb old lead paint, you may swallow lead dust and breathe in lead dust and fumes.

Reduce the risk of lead exposure during home renovations:

- If you are doing the renovation work yourself:
  - Do not eat, drink, or smoke in renovation areas.
  - Wash your hands and face with soap and water before eating, drinking, or smoking.
  - Wear protective clothing and a proper respirator.
  - Use safe work practices and wet cleaning methods to reduce dust exposure.





**Children and adults with lead poisoning may not look or feel sick. If you think you or your family members are at risk for lead poisoning, ask your doctor for a blood lead test.**

Visit [www.odh.ohio.gov/lead](http://www.odh.ohio.gov/lead) to find out more about these and other lead hazards.

## **Ohio Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program**

Phone:  
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**SCAN HERE**

to find out more  
about these and  
other lead hazards.