

Understanding Your Child's Lead Test

A blood lead test is the best way to find out if a child has been exposed to lead. A child with lead exposure may not have visible signs or symptoms. Many children who have lead exposure look and act healthy. Parents can talk to their child's healthcare provider about getting a blood lead test if their child may have been exposed to lead.

Who should be tested for lead exposure?

All children who are at risk for lead exposure should receive a blood lead test. Some children are more likely to be exposed to lead than others. These include children who:

- live or spend time in a house or building built before 1978
- are from low-income households
- are immigrants, refugees, or recently adopted from less developed countries
- live or spend time with someone who works with lead or has hobbies that expose them to lead

Parents/guardians should talk to their child's healthcare provider about whether their child needs to be tested for lead. The child's healthcare provider may ask questions to see if the child is at risk for lead exposure. The best way to know if a child has been exposed to lead is to have their blood tested.

Children enrolled in Medicaid are required to get tested for lead at ages 12 and 24 months, or age 24–72 months if they have no record of ever being tested. For children not enrolled in Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid), CDC recommends focusing testing efforts on high-risk neighborhoods and children.

How is the testing done for lead exposure?

A healthcare provider will test a child's blood for lead. During a blood lead test, a small amount of blood is taken from the finger, heel, or arm and tested for lead.

- A **finger-prick or heel-prick (capillary) sample** is usually the first step to determine if a child has lead in their blood. While finger-prick tests can provide fast results, they also can produce higher results if lead on the skin is captured in the sample. For this reason, a finger-prick test that shows a blood lead level at or above CDC's [blood lead reference value](#) is usually followed by a second test to confirm it.

- A **venous blood draw** takes blood from the child's vein. Blood collected from the vein is less likely to be contaminated with lead during the collection process. However, venous blood cannot currently be tested for lead at the point of care. Because of this, it may take a few days to receive results from the laboratory. A healthcare provider may order a venous blood draw to confirm the blood lead level seen in a test. The table below shows when a child with lead in their blood should receive a venous blood draw to confirm their blood lead level.

Recommended Schedule for Obtaining a Confirmatory Venous Sample

Capillary Blood Lead Level ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$)	Time to Confirmation Testing
≥ 3.5 –9	As soon as possible, or within 3 months
10–19	As soon as possible, or within 1 month
20–44	As soon as possible, or within 2 weeks
≥ 45	Within 48 hours

Healthcare providers can test for lead in the blood. Many private insurance policies cover the cost of testing for lead in the blood. The cost of blood lead testing for children enrolled in Oregon Health Plan is covered by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

What do blood lead test results mean?

A blood lead test shows how much lead is in a child's blood. The amount of lead in blood is referred to as the blood lead level, which is measured in micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$).

Any amount of lead in the blood means the child has been exposed to lead and may be still exposed to lead in their environment. The healthcare provider [recommends follow-up actions and care based on the child's blood lead level](#).

CDC uses a [blood lead reference value](#) of $3.5 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ to identify children with blood lead levels that are higher than most children's levels in the United States. However, no safe level of lead in children has been identified. Even low levels of lead in the blood can negatively impact a child's health and should be viewed as a concern.