

The National Center for Healthy Housing releases tools to help parents make sense of the recent toy recalls and to protect their children from lead hazards.

Columbia, MD -The National Center for Healthy Housing has released two fact sheets to help parents make sense of the recent recalls of toys tainted with lead paint. The first fact sheet titled "Testing for Lead in Consumer Items," explains the various options that parents have for testing household items to confirm or deny the presence of lead. The second fact sheet titled "Toys and Childhood Lead Exposure" explains how lead ends up in toys and how the lead can be ingested by children through normal play. Both fact sheets are available at www.nchh.org.

Even though lead paint was banned in the U.S. in 1978, it continues to be used in many countries throughout the world. Because of this, lax oversight by toy manufacturers and distributors can lead to the importation of toys tainted with lead-based paint. Lead can also be found in toys when it is used as a stabilizer in plastics. Lead makes plastic more flexible and softens the plastic so that it can go back to its original shape. When the plastic is exposed to substances such as sunlight, air, and detergents the chemical bond between the lead and plastics breaks down and forms a dust. This dust can then be ingested by a child playing with the toy.

"The National Center for Healthy Housing is committed to helping achieve the federal goal of eliminating lead poisoning by 2010. We want families to have the best information to protect their children, whether the risk is from lead in toys or lead paint hazards found in older homes," said Jonathan Wilson, Deputy Director of NCHH.

Lead poisoning is also a potential hazard in any home built before 1978, the year when lead paint was banned. Children are particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning, because their developing bodies absorb lead more readily than adults' and they are more likely to put their hands in their mouths after they have touched floors, windowsills, or objects where lead settles after renovation work. Children are also acutely vulnerable to lead's harmful effects because it disrupts crucial development processes.

If you have any reason to suspect that your child has been exposed to lead, contact your child's health care provider to help you decide whether to perform a blood test to see if your child has an elevated blood lead level. A blood lead test is the only way you can tell if your child has an elevated lead level. Most children with elevated blood lead levels have no symptoms. The health care provider can recommend treatment if your child has been exposed to lead.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 310,000 young children in the U.S. have elevated levels of lead in their blood. Lead harms children's nervous systems and is associated with reduced IQ, behavioral problems, and learning disabilities. In large doses, it can cause coma, convulsions and death.

NCHH is the only national scientific and technical non-profit organization dedicated to developing and promoting practical measures to protect children from residential environmental hazards while preserving affordable housing. NCHH develops scientifically valid and practical strategies to make homes safe from hazards, to alert low-income families about housing-related health risks, and to help them protect their children. NCHH also works with governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop standards and programs and guide their implementation through insurers, lenders, federal and state laws and regulations, community organizations, and the courts.