

Vanderburgh County Health Department



Soil Lead Hazards

Exposure to lead can cause damage to the nervous and renal systems, as well as other health effects. Everyone is aware of the danger of lead paint but few realize soil can also present a lead hazard. Low concentrations of lead in soil occur naturally. But bare soil can become a hazard when it is contaminated by airborne emissions, automobile exhaust and leaded paint. Since lead is an element and does not break down, contaminated soil represents a long term source of lead exposure and must be controlled. There are several ways people are exposed to contaminated soil.

- Gardening or landscaping
- Allowing children to play or dig in areas of bare soil
- Contact with pets that have dug or rolled in the soil
- Tracking soil into the home

While children are especially at risk due to their smaller body size, hand to mouth activity and proximity to the hazard, adults can also be poisoned.

Fortunately a few simple steps can lower the risk of exposure.

- Plant grass or other vegetative cover on areas of bare soil
- Erect fences or plant bushes as barriers
- Cover bare soil with a six inch layer of mulch or gravel
- Do not allow children to play in areas of bare soil
- Hands should be washed after contact with soil or,
- Use gloves while gardening or landscaping
- Wash vegetables prior to eating, peel root crops
- Remove shoes before going inside, don't allow pets inside
- Remove and replace the contaminated soil
- Have an annual blood lead test to determine exposure

Call the Health Department at 435-5695 for free blood lead testing and information on lead poisoning.