



# Boston Health Notes

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& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

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## **Protect your children against lead dust during home renovations**

*Nikysha Harding, MPH, Education Coordinator, Boston Public Health Commission's  
Boston Childhood Lead Poisoning and Prevention Program*

More children are lead poisoned by home renovations than you'd think; in some areas of the state, 1/3 of lead poisoning cases are caused by renovations in homes built before 1978. In Boston, 67% of the housing was built before 1978 and is at risk of containing lead hazards. Many "do-it-yourselfers" are surprised to learn that home improvements such as replacing windows or other activities that disturb old paint could cause lead poisoning in the children who live there.

During renovations, whenever old paint is disturbed, a fine lead dust settles on floors, carpets, windowsills or other home surfaces. Precautions must be taken to minimize the release of lead dust in the air. Children can inhale the dust or become poisoned through their normal behavior of putting their own hands or toys that have picked up lead dust into their mouths. Even the smallest amounts of lead can cause learning and behavioral problems. In young children, lead poisoning can lead to brain damage or injury to the kidneys, blood or nervous system.

When you renovate yourself here are just a few things to consider:

- Work on one room at a time using methods that create the least amount of dust.
- Buy or rent a HEPA vacuum.
- If there are children under six years of age in the home, have them leave the home for the day during renovation activities.
- Cover your face with a mask that is made for lead paint removal (available at your local hardware store) since paper masks offer no protection against lead dust.
- Use 6 mil plastic to close off the work area and remove all furniture, appliances drapes, children's toys, clothing, and personal items from the room.
- Use 6 mil plastic to cover heating ducts, vents and grates and turn off forced air heating or air conditioning in the room you are working on.
- Wet surfaces before hand scraping or sanding to minimize dust
- During exterior renovations, cover vegetable gardens with 6 mil plastic to prevent lead from getting into soil; cover sandboxes, play equipment and outdoor

- furniture. The 6 mil plastic should extend out to 8-10 feet from the foundation of the house to prevent paint chips or lead dust from contaminating the yard.
- Purchase tri-sodium phosphate (TSP) at your local hardware store and use it to wash all surfaces during clean-up.

The Boston Public Health Commission's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (BCLPPP) is collaborating with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to provide statewide education about lead poisoning, with a focus on educating homeowners about the serious health hazards of lead exposure during home renovation. Since 2000, the Boston Public Health Commission has been providing free Moderate Risk Deleading Training workshops for Boston homeowners. For a schedule of classes or more information regarding lead poisoning prevention or for other tips on renovating your home safely, call (617) 534-5966 or visit [www.bphc.org](http://www.bphc.org)

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