
This publication was withdrawn on 26 April 2024

This page has been withdrawn because it's out of date.

Look out for old lead paint in your home



Where can I find out more?

- You can find further information and advice on our website at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/chemicals/lead/
- You can also contact the Defra Helpline on 08459 33 55 77 or email: helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
- If you're not sure you can deal with the paintwork safely by yourself, call in a professionally qualified firm of decorators - you can find out who they are from one of the associations representing decorating contractors. Visit the website above for more information.
- Translations of this leaflet are available - contact Defra as above.

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Planning to decorate? Do it safely.



Advice on lead paint in older homes

www.defra.gov.uk



Is my paintwork safe?

Yes, if it's used and treated properly.

We know that too much lead in our bodies isn't healthy. Over the last 30 years or so, a lot has been done to get rid of lead in this country, but you may still come across it in old paint.

This is because up until the mid-1960s, lead was used to make some kinds of paint – for windows, doors and other woodwork as well as for some metal items, like radiators. A few minor uses continued until the 1980s.

How will I know if there's lead in my paintwork?

- The age of your home is a good guide. If it was built before the 1960s and still has original coats of paint, there could be some lead around.
- Another clue is if your paintwork is quite thick – lead could be locked into the oldest layers. That's not a problem if it's in good condition and you don't plan to decorate. If it has recently had a new coat of paint, this probably will have sealed any lead in.
- Modern household paints do not contain added lead and are not dangerous. So if your home is newer, there won't be any lead there.

Is there a risk to me or my family?

- The people most at risk from lead are young children and pregnant women.
- If you think the paintwork is likely to get knocked or chewed by young children, or scratched by pets, or if it could be damaged in some other way that could release lead dust into your home, it would be best to sort it out now.
- If you are planning any decorating there are ways you can deal with lead paintwork safely.
- If you think your home does have lead paintwork, especially if it's in bad condition, peeling or flaking – it's best to be on the safe side. So read on.

How can we make sure we're safe?

- The easiest way of dealing with lead paintwork – if it's in good condition – is to seal it in with an overcoating of modern paint.
- But if the paintwork is in bad condition and needs to be removed before you can decorate, use methods that don't create dust or fumes, like a solvent or caustic-based liquid stripper. Don't forget to follow the safety instructions if you do use solvents or liquid strippers and remember that solvent-free, water-based paint removers are now available – ask at your DIY store for details.
- If you have to use a hot-air gun, use it just enough to soften the paint – don't burn it because this will release fumes. A good guide is to make sure your gun is set below 450°C. Keep surfaces moist when removing paint.

- Wear protective clothes, gloves and a good quality face mask with a filter conforming to EN143 P2. Shut off the work area and don't let other people in, especially children or pregnant women. If possible, remove furniture and carpets; otherwise cover them completely.
- When you break from the work, store the clothes you've been wearing in a sealed plastic bag and wash your hands and any other bare skin before you do anything else.
- When you've taken most of the paint off, moisten the surface and smooth it with a water-proof abrasive paper – don't use dry sandpaper.
- When you've finished, put the removed paint and any residues on coverings in a safe container – a sealed plastic bag will do – and put it out with the rubbish.
- Thoroughly clean the room you've been working in and any coverings used with a solution of dishwasher detergent (not washing up liquid). If you need to get rid of any dust after decorating, you may have to use an industrial standard vacuum cleaner (complying with British Standard 5415); and wash the clothes you've been working in separately from any others.