Frequently Asked Questions About **Lead**

What is lead?

- Lead is a naturally occurring element found in rocks and soil.
- Lead is present in the environment due to both historical use in consumer products, like gas and paint, and current use in the production of consumer products, like batteries, ammunition and metal products.
- Starting in the 1970s, efforts have been made in the United States to reduce the use of lead in products, like plumbing, house paint and gas.

How are people exposed to lead?

- Breathing dust or eating dirt, especially in or near homes built before 1978 that may contain lead-based paint.
- Eating foods that contain lead. Everyday foods can have lead in them, and some food items may have high levels of lead.
- Drinking water containing lead. Lead found in drinking water often comes from water pipes and faucets that contain lead.
- Using certain traditional medicines, herbal remedies or imported spices containing lead.
- Smoking, hookah or vaping.
- Breathing secondhand smoke or vape aerosols.

- Breathing or swallowing lead while engaging in hobbies that involve lead, such as:
    - Renovating houses with lead-based paint.
    - Hunting or shooting with lead bullets.
    - Using lead solder when creating stained glass.
    - Using materials that contain lead for pottery and metal work.
- Breathing or swallowing lead during work. Work that commonly involves lead includes:
    - Removal of lead-based paint commonly used in homes built before 1978.
    - Brass and bronze manufacturing.
    - Lead battery manufacture and recycling.
    - Working at a shooting range.

How can lead harm people's health?

- Exposure to even low amounts of lead in adults can result in:
    - Increased blood pressure.
    - Decreased kidney function.
    - Decreased cognitive function.
    - Slower reaction times.
    - Altered mood and behavior.
- Along with the health effects listed above, exposure to high amounts of lead in adults can result in:

    - Anemia.
    - Muscle weakness or soreness.
    - Severe stomachache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and/or constipation.
    - Poor sperm and semen quality.
    - Delayed conception.
    - Increased risk of heart disease.
- Exposure to lead in pregnant people and young children is especially serious because exposure to lead early in life has been shown to cause problems with learning, behavior, hearing and growth.

How can people reduce their exposure to lead?

- Find out if there is lead in drinking water by having it tested for lead.
    - If needed, use a certified lead-reducing filter.
    - For more information on lead in drinking water, such as who should use a lead-reducing filter, visit Michigan.gov/mileadsafe.
- Pay attention to food recall notices. Avoid foods with high levels of lead.
- Eat a well-balanced diet with enough calcium, iron and vitamin C, which can help reduce the amount of lead that the body absorbs.

- If people know or suspect their home could have lead-based paint, they should:
    - Regularly clean the house using damp cloths or mops to remove lead dust and paint chips. This prevents lead from becoming airborne.
    - Keep children away from chipped and peeling paint.
- Use a certified professional if they plan to permanently remove or seal lead-based paint.
- Avoid breathing in smoke or vape aerosols.
    - For resources on quitting smoking, visit 1-800-QUIT-NOW.
- When working at a job with the potential for lead exposure:
    - Practice good personal hygiene by washing hands often, especially before eating or drinking, and by showering after working.
    - Use personal protective equipment (PPE) as directed.
    - Do not eat, drink, smoke or vape in the workplace.
- Use appropriate PPE and ventilation when engaging in hobbies that use lead or doing home renovations in older homes.

Questions?

Call 1-800-648-6942 or visit Michigan.gov/DEHBio and click on “MiChEM” to view additional resources.