

# Lead still poisons UK children

*The WHO International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week would be a great time for a story about the continuing issue of lead exposure and poisoning in the UK.*

UNITED KINGDOM, October 6, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The focus of the World Health Organisation International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week 2023 is “End Childhood Lead Poisoning”. Lead is the world’s top toxin ([World Bank](#)).



**LEAD: THE BIG, GREY, DANGEROUS, HEAVY ELEMENT IN THE ROOM**  
Peebee The Elephant

- Hundreds of thousands of UK children are estimated to have lead poisoning.
- Lead toxicity is linked to brain damage and life-long health impacts.
- Children are the most vulnerable.

“

My little man had a lead level high as 20 when we found out. As a mum I’m completely devastated that I didn’t do more research on my house before moving in! My sweet baby. The guilt I feel is terrible”

*Real parent on Facebook*

- Lead is still found in paint, pipes, soil, and other sources.
- Lead exposure can happen at home, school, or from take-home lead.

The condition of UK housing and schools has featured heavily in the news recently. One related health impact that is underreported is lead exposure. UNICEF estimated that 186,117 to 281,542 UK children have a blood lead concentration above the Health Security Agency’s intervention level. They also estimated that lead toxicity costs the UK about £6.8 billion per year ([UNICEF 2020](#)).

Young children are particularly vulnerable to the neurotoxic harms of lead (WHO 2021). The associated effects include IQ loss, ADHD, lower academic achievement, decreased hearing, language difficulties, problem behaviour, and delayed puberty.

Lead exposure is also associated with long-term harm in adults, including depression, anxiety, panic, heart attack, stroke, increased blood pressure, essential tremor, and reduced kidney function. Exposure in pregnancy is linked to miscarriage, premature birth, and low birth weight

(BUMPS).

No safe level of lead exposure has been identified (WHO 2023).

Lead ingestion can happen if children mouth lead-painted surfaces or old toys, when playing in contaminated soil, drinking from lead or lead-soldered pipes. Also from some cosmetics, traditional remedies, glasses, ceramics, spices, jewellery, and from hand-to-mouth migration of household dust especially from decorating, but also chipped or flaking paint, and rubbing windows or doors (EPA). However, the [CDC](#) says that lead poisoning is 100% preventable.

President Biden has said that lead pipes are a “clear and present danger to our children”. Vice-President Harris has said that lead is an “emergency in our country” and “for every dollar we spend on lead remediation, our communities get at least \$3 back”. The G7 have encouraged “regulation or control of lead, which can deliver societal benefits that far exceed the costs.”

There are reasons to believe that the UK is worse than the USA for lead hazards. We have the oldest housing stock in the world. We stopped using lead in paint, pipes, and petrol decades ago, but the toxic legacy remains. Over half of UK homes were built before lead paint was restricted and lead pipes were banned. 82% of homes were built before most lead paint was made illegal, an estimated 9 million homes still have lead pipes, and lead from petrol is still found in soil.

The cost-benefit ratio for lead hazard reduction is better than that for vaccines (WHO 2010) and there are many low-cost interventions that can help reduce lead exposure. Three cheap, simple,

The infographic is divided into two main sections. The top section features a large 'Pb' symbol with a skull and crossbones, surrounded by various icons and labels for lead sources: '82' (with a key icon), 'PAINT & PIGMENTS' (with a paint bucket), 'OLD ELECTRONICS & MACHINERY' (with a radio), 'ARMS & AMMUNITION' (with a bullet), 'LEAD-ACID BATTERIES' (with a battery), 'FUEL FOR SMALL ENGINE AIR-CRAFT' (with a fuel can), 'SOME JEWELLERY' (with a ring), 'GLAZED CERAMICS' (with a vase), 'POORLY CONTROLLED INDUSTRY & MINING' (with a factory), 'SOME COSMETICS' (with a tube), 'KOHL & SINDOOR' (with a stick), 'SOLDER' (with a soldering iron), 'SOME TRADITIONAL MEDICINE' (with a pill), 'STAINED GLASS SOLDER & CRYSTAL GLASSWARE' (with a stained glass window), 'SOME FOOD & SPICES' (with a bowl), and 'SOLDERED WATER PIPES' and 'CONTAMINATED WATER' (with a faucet and water drop). The bottom section is a dark blue banner with the WHO logo and text: 'World Health Organization', 'International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week', '22-28', and 'OCTOBER 2023'. A QR code is in the top right, and a photo of a baby is in the bottom right.

and quick initiatives could include:

- Home surveys to include lead exposure risk assessments
- Place information leaflets in trade and DIY outlets
- GPs to be educated on conditions related to lead and encouraged to provide blood tests

Please don't let the story of millions of blighted UK lives, and wasted £ billions, remain untold.

Quotes from parents

These powerful quotes from parents illustrate the tragic impact lead can have on lives. From the Facebook group "Support for Parents of Children with Lead Poisoning" or used with permission

- "I feel so upset. So sad. So guilty. And first and foremost so scared. My 18-month-old son deserves so much more than to be lead poisoned. All I can do now that I have found the source is to eliminate it. And keep him away until then. And I'm heartbroken."
- "My anxiety over the situation and my guilt and fear that I had possibly harmed my son, was the worst terror I had ever experienced. "
- "This slum landlord stole my son's life."

LEAPP Alliance

The Lead Exposure and Poisoning Prevention (LEAPP) Alliance is a growing group of over 70 academics, experts, parents, and advocates that aims to reduce lead poisoning in the UK. We stand ready to work with journalists including providing interviews with families who have been affected.

Further information can be found on our website including our "Manifesto for a Lead-Safe UK"

Sources

ILPPW <https://www.who.int/campaigns/international-lead-poisoning-prevention-week/2023>

WHO 2021 <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240037045>

BUMPS <https://www.medicinesinpregnancy.org/Medicine--pregnancy/Lead>

WHO 2023 <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240078130>

Decorating

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7b938f40f0b645ba3c5360/pb10973-leadpaintleaflet.pdf>

EPA <https://www.epa.gov/lead/protect-your-family-sources-lead>

"Clear and present danger to our children" <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/04/29/remarks-by-president-biden-in-address-to-a-joint-session-of-congress/>

"Emergency in our country" <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches->

[remarks/2021/12/16/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-on-the-biden-harris-lead-pipe-and-paint-action-plan/](https://www.bretrust.com/bretrust/The-Housing-Stock-of-the-United-Kingdom_Report_BRE-Trust.pdf)

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[https://www.bmuv.de/fileadmin/Daten\\_BMU/Download\\_PDF/Europa\\_International/g7\\_climate\\_energy\\_environment\\_ministers\\_communique\\_bf.pdf](https://www.bmuv.de/fileadmin/Daten_BMU/Download_PDF/Europa_International/g7_climate_energy_environment_ministers_communique_bf.pdf)

Oldest housing stock [https://files.bregroup.com/bretrust/The-Housing-Stock-of-the-United-Kingdom\\_Report\\_BRE-Trust.pdf](https://files.bregroup.com/bretrust/The-Housing-Stock-of-the-United-Kingdom_Report_BRE-Trust.pdf)

82% of homes <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2014-to-2015-housing-stock-report>

Lead paint was made illegal

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1992/31/sld/made/data.htm?wrap=true>

9 million homes

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/15810/142631.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/15810/142631.pdf)

still found in soil <https://www.pnas.org/content/118/26/e2102791118>

WHO 2020 [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/136571/9789241500333\\_eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/136571/9789241500333_eng.pdf)

Interventions [https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2017/08/hip\\_childhood\\_lead\\_poisoning\\_report.pdf](https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2017/08/hip_childhood_lead_poisoning_report.pdf)

Manifesto for a Lead-Safe UK <https://leappalliance.org.uk/manifesto/>

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