



Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

MEDIA RELEASE

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NHMRC releases Statement and Information Paper on impacts of lead on human health

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has today released a Statement and Information Paper summarising the evidence on the effects of lead on human health.

People's exposure to lead has substantially reduced over recent decades due to national initiatives which have restricted the addition of lead to paint and petrol, and restricted the use of lead in consumer goods.

The average blood lead level among Australians is now estimated to be less than 5 micrograms per decilitre. This level is likely to decrease further over time as the presence of lead in the environment continues to reduce.

Although lead is a naturally occurring substance, it is not necessary for human health and can be harmful to the human body.

The NHMRC Statement recommends that if a person has a blood lead level greater than 5 micrograms per decilitre, the source of lead exposure should be investigated and reduced, particularly if the person is a child or pregnant woman.

NHMRC CEO, Professor Anne Kelso AO, noted that this recommendation has been made to focus on identifying people who have been exposed to more lead than the trace 'background' amounts typically found in everyday environments.

"The Statement reinforces the need for policies which minimise communities' exposure to lead, including by minimising the amount of lead that is introduced into our living environments," Professor Kelso said.

No noticeable health effects have been identified in individuals with blood lead levels less than 10 micrograms per decilitre, but the NHMRC considers that a blood lead level greater than 5 micrograms per decilitre warrants investigation into the source of exposure.

The Statement and Information Paper have been developed based on a NHMRC commissioned assessment of the latest published evidence on the health effects of lead.

This review was overseen by NHMRC's Lead Working Committee which comprised experts in public and environmental health, toxicology, paediatrics and consumer issues.

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Chair of the Lead Working Committee, Associate Professor Sophie Dwyer PSM, noted that the statement and information paper provide a sound interpretation of the available evidence on the health effects of low level lead exposure.

“People do not need to have their blood lead level tested unless they suspect they have been exposed to lead through activities such as restoration of old homes or furniture. People should consult their general practitioner if they are concerned”, Associate Professor Dwyer said.

In communities that are at risk of lead exposure due to industry (e.g. lead mining or smelting), health authorities should continue to run programs to monitor and reduce lead exposure.

The Statement updates previous work by NHMRC. The *NHMRC Information Paper: Evidence on the Effects of Lead on Human Health*, underwent public consultation from July to September 2014 and will replace the 2009 *NHMRC Information Paper – Blood lead levels for Australians*.

The statement and information paper are now available from the [NHMRC website](#).

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