MidCentral Health
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Public Health
Hauora mo te Iwi
PROMOTION * PROTECTION * SURVEILLANCE

LEAD-BASED PAINT AND ASBESTOS IN THE HOME

Lead-based paint

Exposure to lead-based paint and associated lead-based paint dust or fumes is one of the most commonly reported lead sources in the MidCentral Health region. Lead-based paint is almost certain to be present on pre-1980 paintwork. Building occupants and others are not normally exposed to the hazards associated with lead in paint. However, the risk of exposure increases as lead-based paint films deteriorate, become damaged or are removed unsafely during redecorating or renovation. Pre-school children are particularly susceptible to poisoning from lead-based paint because of their learning behaviour patterns, i.e. hand to mouth activities, and their relative body size. Lead-based paint has a sweet taste and children may develop a taste for eating flaking paint.

Children and adults may be exposed to other sources of lead apart from lead-based paint in their homes. Activities that may potentially expose you or your children to lead include: lead lighting, manufacture of lead fishing weights, cleaning and loading of fire arms, soldering and car radiator repairs. Children's exposure to these activities should be avoided.

Asbestos in the home

Asbestos is the name used for a group of natural minerals that are made up of many small fibres. Asbestos only poses a risk to health when inhaled as fine dust. The risk to health increases with the number of fibres breathed in and the frequency of exposure. Brief exposure to low concentrations of airborne asbestos fibres inside the home is unlikely to be a major health risk. Constant exposure to crumbly or powdery, damaged, exposed, or poorly maintained asbestos material may increase the health risk.

Possible sources of asbestos in the home include:

- textured ceiling claddings;
- vinyl floor tiles and the backing on vinyl sheet flooring and adhesives;
- some roofing, cladding and siding shingles;
- insulation in houses built between 1930-1950.

Asbestos-containing material is not a risk if it is in sound condition and not disturbed by drilling, sanding etc. It is therefore best left undisturbed. There is a risk in the home setting where the material is friable, cracking, loose or flaking, showing signs of mildew or mould damage, or is not securely fastened. If the material meets one of these criteria we recommend it is tested.

SAMPLING

If you wish you can ring our office and have these instructions and zip lock plastic bags sent out for you to use. Otherwise you can use your own sealable bags or envelopes and deliver or post them to us for sampling. Address follows these instructions.

Taking a paint sample for lead analysis

1. Cut a small paint chip/flake (approx. 1 square cm if possible) from the surface to be tested with a clean, sharp knife, making sure all paint layers are represented.
2. Place the sample in the enclosed plastic bag. Other sealable bags or envelopes can also be used.
3. Write on the bag which part of the house you have taken the sample from, i.e. "lounge wall", " kitchen window".
4. If you are taking more than one sample place each sample in a different bag and label accordingly.
5. Wash your hands and wipe or clean the knife between samples to avoid cross-contamination. Wash hands after sampling.
6. Include your name, address and contact details in the envelope before posting. Please ensure address of sampled premise is also supplied if different to your contact address.

NB: include paint flakes only, we are unable to test samples of paint dust The test is carried out by Health Protection staff at the Public Health Unit. We should be able to provide you with results within a day of receiving the samples.

Taking a sample for asbestos analysis

1. Dampen/wet area to be sampled, or wear a dust mask if it is likely to create dust when handling.
2. Approximately 2 square cms of material is required for testing. Smaller amounts may be able to be tested if this quantity cannot be obtained.
3. Place each sample in a separate plastic bag and label with type of material and where it is from, i.e. "kitchen lino", "lounge ceiling", "exterior house cladding".
4. Wash hands and implements between each sample to avoid cross contamination. Wash hands after sampling.
5. Include your name, address and contact details in the envelope before posting. Please ensure address of sampled premise is also supplied if different to your contact address.

NB: Health Protection Officers send the sample away for laboratory testing. Results normally take around 5 working days.

- Public Health Unit, Rata House, Community Health Village, Palmerston North Hospital P O Box 2056 Palmerston North. See map on Public Health page *{link? Directions? To good map held on there or elsewhere?}* for directions.
- Please contact a Health Protection Officer at the Public Health Unit if you have any questions. **Telephone (06) 350 9110.**