



# Safely removing lead-based paint

Health New Zealand  
Te Whatu Ora

# Lead poisoning from lead-based paint

Buildings and houses painted before 1980 can have lead-based paint on their interior or exterior surfaces.

If you are not careful when removing lead-based paint from such buildings then you or your family can get sick with lead poisoning.

Lead poisoning can have irreversible effects on infants and children and have detrimental and lasting health effects on adults.

People who might get sick from lead in the paint include:

- The person removing it (from dust, paint flakes, or fumes)
- Young children who lick or chew painted surfaces, or swallow paint flakes or dust
- Young children who play in or eat dirt contaminated with lead paint
- Pregnant women, and their unborn children, if lead-contaminated dust is ingested during pregnancy.

Pets eating dirt, or licking surfaces, contaminated with lead paint can also get sick.

## Testing for lead

You can't see if paint has lead in it just by looking at it. To check if the house you are working on has lead-based paint, you can do a test using a lead-based paint kit. These can be bought from a hardware or paint store.

If you are unable to find a test kit, you should assume any homes painted before 1980 may have lead paint.

You can also contact your local office of the National Public Health Service who can advise on testing.

# Protecting yourself

## When removing lead-based paint:

- Wear a high quality, properly fitted dust respirator.
- Preferably wear disposable overalls (single use).
- Cover your head to prevent dust, paint chips and paint flakes getting in your hair. Use a disposable hat or hood as part of disposable overalls.
- Wear appropriate clothing for working with lead-based paint that can be disposed of or removed before entering clean areas.
- Wash and dry your face and hands before eating, smoking or vaping.

## Before leaving your work area:

- Ensure it is safe and clean from dust and paint flakes. Wrap and bag all waste for safe disposal.
- Change out of your overalls/clothes, and shoes/work boots.
- Wash hands and face.

## After leaving your work area:

- Wash any work clothing separately from other laundry.
- Shower thoroughly to remove dust.



# Methods of removing lead-based paint

If you can, it's recommended that you use professional painters to remove lead-based paint. However, if you do it yourself, you need to take proper safety precautions to avoid potential lead exposure. All dust and paint flakes should be treated as if contaminated with lead.

The following are some methods available. All of them should be carried out with the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

## Preferred methods

### Wet sanding

This method involves using sandpaper with water to keep the area wet and stop dust from being generated. This is the best option to reduce dust.

**Safety Measures:** Clean up any dust and paint flakes with wet cloths. Spray bottles with water can be used to keep areas wet and dust suppressed.

### Scraping

Done with specific tools and for larger areas.

**Safety Measures:** Clean up any dust and paint flakes with wet cloths. Spray bottles with water can be used to keep areas wet and dust suppressed. Rubbish should be bagged and disposed of appropriately.

Use water to move paint flakes and rubbish together so it can be taken away safely. Stop paint flakes going onto other properties or into drains.

## Not recommended methods

### Dry sanding by hand or machine

*This method **is not recommended** due to the high levels of dust created.*

Sanding machines, such as orbital sanders, disc grinder sanders, pistol grip disc sanders and belt sanders, should be fitted with vacuums where possible and the safety measures should be strictly adhered to.

**Safety Measures:** If you use any type of machine, wear a professionally fitted respirator. This is important even when using a belt sander with an extraction bag (these are only partially effective). Cover ground/carpets with a dust sheet. Keep children and pets away from the work area.

## Chemicals

*This method **is not recommended** due to the risks of working with potentially harmful and toxic chemicals. It should be done by experienced renovators or professionals.*

Usually used for small surfaces such as window frames.

**Safety Measures:** Wear safety glasses, overalls, and gloves to avoid contact with the skin. When inside, keep the windows open for fresh air. Follow any instructions on the label.

## Water-blasting

*This method **is not recommended** due to the high levels of dust and flakes created. It should be done by experienced renovators or professionals only and in accordance with WorkSafe and local council rules.*

For outside surfaces only.

## Abrasive blasting (Sand blasting)

*This method **is not recommended** due to the high levels of dust created. It should be done by experienced renovators or professionals only and in accordance with WorkSafe and local council rules.*

**Safety Measures:** Dust and paint flakes using this method are hard to control and can create a large contaminated area.

## Blasting with heat

*This method **is not recommended** as heat will produce lead fumes. Beware also of fire risk.*

An electric paint stripper, hot air blower, or blow torch will heat the paint and blister it, so that it can be scraped off.

**Safety Measures:** Wear a professionally fitted respirator if using a hot air blower, blow torch, or electric paint stripper. Have a fire extinguisher or water handy in case of fire. If using a blow torch indoors, make sure that windows are open.

# Safety tips for removing lead-based paint



Remove play equipment, pets, personal belongings, bedding and soft furniture before removing lead paint.



Close windows and doors.



Cover carpets and floors with drop-sheets to catch paint flakes and dust.



Wipe surfaces with a wet cloth to clean dust, paint chips and paint flakes and dispose of it appropriately. A spray bottle with water can be used to suppress dust.



Use a commercial vacuum cleaner fitted with a HEPA filter (high efficiency dust filter). Don't use a vacuum cleaner without a HEPA filter. If you're unsure, then seek professional advice, or hire a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter.



Wrap and bag waste and rubbish for disposal. Small amounts of paint waste can generally be disposed of with your household refuse, but for large amounts of waste, please check your local council for the best method of safe disposal.



DO NOT burn rubbish, wood or other materials that have been painted with lead-based paint. Fumes containing lead particles can be released into the air and environment.



Protect your garden (especially fruit and vegetables) during paint removal by covering plants and soil, keeping a safe distance, and rinsing anything that may have been exposed to paint dust or debris.

For more information visit:  
**[info.health.nz/keeping-healthy/hazardous-substances/lead-based-paint](https://info.health.nz/keeping-healthy/hazardous-substances/lead-based-paint)**

