

Lead-Safe Cleaning

June 2025

Lead found in paint and older items in your home crumbles over time into invisible dust. Lead dust clings to hands, toys, and objects that children put in their mouths, putting them at risk for lead poisoning. You can help prevent lead poisoning by following lead-safe cleaning practices to keep your home free of lead dust.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact AHS.HealthyHomes@vermont.gov.

Why clean lead safe?

Lead is a highly toxic metal. Too much lead in the body can cause serious and permanent health problems for anyone, but children and pregnant people are at special risk. Being exposed to lead while you are pregnant can increase the risk of miscarriage and cause babies to be born too small or too early.

The Health Department recommends testing all children at ages 1 and 2. Talk to your health care provider about lead testing.

What is a HEPA vacuum?

High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters can remove very fine particles from air. Be sure to look for a vacuum that meets the Environmental Protection Agency's requirements for 99.97% efficiency at dust filtration. Many vacuum manufacturers say they use HEPA filters but do not actually meet this efficiency requirement. Regular household vacuums release small particles of lead into the air, which spreads lead dust around rather than removing it.

You can buy HEPA vacuums at most local stores that carry home appliances.

How to Clean

Be sure to clean in and around windows, baseboards, doors, stairways and floors. Clean high touch areas like windows and floors weekly. Keep children and anyone who is pregnant out of the area while you clean.

1. Wear gloves.
2. Use a spray bottle to help reduce dust. Wash surfaces with an all-purpose cleaner and scrub well.
3. Use a new paper towel to clean each area. Do not use a cloth or sponge, which will only spread dust. Clean until the paper towel has no visible dirt.

4. Put paper towels and any paint chips in a plastic bag. Close the bag tightly and throw it out with the trash.
5. Wash your hands after cleaning.

Cleaning Hard Surface Floors

- Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter on the floor before mopping or washing.
- Avoid sweeping, which moves lead dust around.
- Use a wet mop with disposable pads, like a Swiffer, and replace the pads frequently.
 - It's best to use a mop with disposable pads. Regular mops can leave behind residue that contains lead. If you use a regular mop, take a last pass with a mop that uses disposable pads to make sure no residue is left.
- For smaller areas, use a spray bottle filled with cleaning solution and wipe the floor with paper towels. Throw the towels away in a plastic bag and close the bag tightly.

Cleaning Carpets

- Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter to clean carpeted surfaces. Use the corner tool in corners, cracks of trim and edges of carpet.
- Vacuum carpets very slowly. Allow the vacuum time to bring dust from the deepest parts of the carpet.
- Vacuum the room in one direction for the first pass. For a second pass, vacuum across the first pass.

Keeping Lead Out of Your Home

Lead paint is the most common cause of lead poisoning in Vermont. If you live in a building built before 1978, you likely have lead-based paint in your home. Be sure to address chipping or peeling paint right away to prevent lead poisoning.

If you own your home, hire a contractor that is Lead-Safe Renovation, Repair, Painting and Maintenance (RRPM) certified to do renovations. Learn more about Lead-Safe RRPM for homeowners at HealthVermont.gov/BeLeadSafe.

If you rent your home, it's important to make sure your landlord or the contractors they hire are RRPM certified. Learn more about Lead-Safe RRPM for renters at HealthVermont.gov/AskNow.