

Lead Exposure – Ask The Expert



Knowing what to do when you or your employees come into contact with organic or inorganic lead can be a matter of life or death.

QUESTION

What are the steps I should take as an employer when there is a potential exposure to lead? How in-depth does the procedure need to be when there is a high lead event? Do the exposed employees need to be notified of the exposure, and what does that entail?

ANSWER

Here is what you should include for both organic and inorganic lead exposure or working with lead:

- Pre-placement medical testing.
- Periodic testing at frequency to be determined on bases of pre-placement testing and other medical records.
- Testing after acute exposure.
- Exit testing.
- Stipulation of clinical tests to be used for each stage of testing.
- Stipulation of the criteria/levels calling for the worker's removal from exposure (or other actions to

protect the worker).

EXPLANATION

If you want to see the clinical details for every step you must take when working with or being exposed to lead, refer to the [guidelines on the Ontario MOL website](#), which also works outside of Ontario.

For thorough steps to address lead exposure:

- **Isolate the Area:** Restrict access to the affected zone to prevent further exposure.
- **Provide Medical Evaluation:** Offer exposed employees prompt medical assessments to determine lead levels in their blood.
- **Conduct Exposure Assessment:** Evaluate the extent of lead exposure through air monitoring and surface sampling.
- **Implement Control Measures:** Introduce engineering controls (e.g., ventilation), administrative controls (e.g., rotating job assignments), and personal protective equipment (PPE) to minimize exposure.
- **Ensure Proper Hygiene:** Provide facilities for employees to wash hands and face before breaks and at the end of shifts to reduce ingestion risks.
- **Inform Employees:** Educate workers about lead hazards, safe work practices, and the importance of hygiene to prevent lead absorption.

In the event of significant lead exposure, procedures should be thorough and may include:

- **Comprehensive Medical Surveillance:** Regular blood lead level testing and health evaluations to monitor affected employees.
- **Detailed Documentation:** Maintain records of exposure levels, medical assessments, and implemented control measures.

- **Enhanced Training:** Provide in-depth training on lead hazards, proper use of PPE, and decontamination procedures.
- **Environmental Remediation:** Decontaminate the workplace to remove lead sources and prevent future exposures.

Reporting requirements may include:

- **Incident Details:** Provide information on the exposure event, including duration, concentration levels, and number of employees affected.
- **Corrective Actions:** Outline steps taken to mitigate exposure and prevent recurrence.

Specific reporting obligations can vary by jurisdiction. For instance, in Ontario, employers are required to notify the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development in cases of occupational illness, including lead exposure.

When notifying exposed employees:

- **Personal Notification:** Communicate directly with affected employees regarding the nature and extent of their exposure.
- **Medical Information:** Provide details on available medical evaluations and the importance of monitoring blood lead levels.
- **Protective Measures:** Educate on steps being taken to reduce exposure and any changes to work practices.

Check out our post on [working safely with lead](#) and take our [lead quiz](#) to make sure you are complying with all provincial and federal requirements to keep you and your workers safe.