Lead poisoning is a serious problem in young children. It can affect some of the body's basic functions and is especially harmful to the brain and nervous system. Young children are at particular risk because they put everything in their mouths, they absorb more lead than adults and their bodies are still developing rapidly.

The source...

- Peeling paint chips and paint dust in homes built before 1978 (Homes and porch areas are even worse.)
- Soil and dirt found outside, especially around older homes and porch areas
- Soil outside houses located near major roadways
- Sandboxes
- News print and magazines
- Drinking water from older homes with lead or solder pipes (especially hot tap water and water that has been standing in the pipes for a few hours)
- Materials used to make pottery, refinish furniture, stained glass, vinyl mini-blinds, some imported toys
- Folk remedies such as "greta," "azarcon," and "paylooah" may contain lead.
- Smoke and dust from wood burning stoves or fireplaces that burn lead-painted wood
- Job sites with lead smelters, battery burning, auto repair, and construction all expose skin, hair, and clothes to lead dust that can be brought into the house.

The signs...

Children who have high lead levels often do not act sick. Signs and symptoms may include:

- Headaches
- Weight loss
- Hyperactivity
- Poor school performance
- Stomach aches
- Anemia
- Constipation
- Vomiting
- Achy joints
- Hearing trouble
- Behavior changes
- Tiredness

Extremely high lead levels can lead to coma, convulsions, and death.

A blood test can tell if your child has too much in his system. An acceptable blood lead level is less than 10 mcg/dl.

Your child's doctor will tell you if your child's lead level is too high. If your child's blood level is greater than 10 mcg/dl, the doctor will talk to you about where the lead might be coming from and repeat the blood test later. If your child's blood level is above 15 mcg/dl, the health department may be asked to come help you identify any lead sources in your home. They can also help you find ways to safely remove the lead from your house. All blood lead levels are reported to the appropriate health department.
Your child may also need medication to remove lead from his body. This medicine may be
given by mouth at home or treatments in the hospital, depending on the level of lead in
your child's body.

The solution...

Preventing lead poisoning in children is not hard when you follow these steps
(especially if your home was built before 1978 or you live near a major highway.)

- Always wash your child's face and hands before he eats or sleeps.
- Wash pacifiers and toys frequently with soap and water.
- Provide well-balanced meals. Give your child plenty of foods that contain iron and
calcium. Fatty foods cause your child's body to absorb more lead. Ask your child's
doctor about good food sources of iron and calcium for kids, or call the Children's
Mercy Information Line at (816) 234-3188.
- Run tap water for a minute or two before drinking it, especially the first time you
  turn the water on in the morning. When you need hot water for drinking or cooking,
  use cold tap water and boil it.
- Keep your child away from peeling paint, especially around windowsills, stairs and
  banisters. Do not let your child chew on lead- painted surfaces.
- Have your child wash his hands frequently, especially after playing outside (in
  sandboxes and dirt), working with potted plants or handling newspapers.
- Keep your home clean. Damp mop bare floors at least one a week. Also damp wipe
  windowsills, stairs, banisters and other flat surfaces with clean water each week.
- If your house has lead hazards, get help from a trained contractor to safely remove
  the lead before doing renovations or remodeling.

Additional Information:

- Kreamer Family Resource Center, Children's Mercy Hospital (816) 234-3900
- Environmental Protection Agency – Local Region 7 (913) 551-7020
- Kansas City Missouri Health Department Lead Program (816) 983-4102
- Lead Busters, Inc. (local not-for-profit) (816) 438-LEAD (5323)
- Missouri State Childhood Lead Program 1-800-575-9267
- National Lead Information Center's Clearinghouse 1-800-424-LEAD (5323)
- Hearing Impaired TDD 1-800-526-5456
- Safe Drinking Water Hotline 1-800-426-4791