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## NIAGARA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 10/22/08

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Lead is a major environmental threat for children in New York State. Lead is especially dangerous for young children, where it can cause problems with a child's growth, behavior, and ability to learn. Lead can also harm babies before they are born. To raise the public's awareness of childhood lead poisoning, National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week is being observed this week.

Most childhood lead poisoning is caused by lead dust from old, peeling lead paint in buildings built before 1978. This, often invisible, lead dust settles on toys, windowsills and floors. A child can get lead poisoning by swallowing or breathing in lead or lead dust. Only a small amount of lead is needed to harm a young, growing child. "Lead is especially dangerous for young children. Young children spend a lot of time on the floor and they put hands, toys and other things in their mouth," said Wanda Smiley, RN, MSN, Director of Patient Services from the Niagara County Department of Health.

If you have young children, James Devald, PE, Director of Environmental Health from the Niagara County Department of Health recommends the following to help protect them from lead in their environment: Assume any home built before 1978 contains lead paint; keep all painted surfaces in good condition; keep babies and children away from any peeling or chipped paint and before you

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repair peeling paint or do home renovations, call your local health department to find out how to paint and repair safely to keep dust levels down. Also, pregnant women and children should be aware of the possible dangers and take special precautions.

If you rent a home built before 1978, ask your landlord to repair any peeling paint safely. If the landlord is not responsive, you can call your local building inspector or town clerk, also listed in the phone book government blue pages.

Wash your children's hands, face, toys, bottles and pacifiers often. Feed your children foods that have calcium, iron and Vitamin C. If your child breathes in or swallows lead, these foods will help lower the amount of lead that stays in your child's blood.

If you have a job or hobby that involves working with lead, you should shower and change clothes and shoes before going home. Wash work clothes separately from other clothes.

Lead has been found in Mexican, Indian and Middle Eastern pottery, painted china, leaded glass, crystal and pewter. These should not be used to serve or store food. High levels of lead have also been found in some Ayurvedic medicines, kohl, surma, greta and azarcon.

Most children with lead poisoning do not look or feel sick. The only way to know if a child has lead poisoning is to get a blood lead test. In New York State, health care providers are required to test all children for lead at age one year and again at age two years.

During this week, we want to remind Niagara County residents that the Niagara County Department of Health offers free or low-cost screening for lead poisoning for children under the age of six who are underinsured or have no insurance coverage.

For more information on how to prevent childhood lead poisoning, call the Niagara County Department of Health's Nursing Division for finger stick testing at 439-7513 or the Environmental Health Division at 439-7444 for building or environmental concerns. You may visit the Niagara County Department of Health's web site at [www.niagaracounty.com/health](http://www.niagaracounty.com/health) or the New York State Department of Health's web site at: [www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/lead](http://www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/lead).

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