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Basic Information about Lead Air Pollution

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How does lead get in the air?

Sources of lead emissions vary from one area to another. At the national level, major sources of lead in the air are ore and metals processing and piston-engine aircraft operating on leaded aviation fuel. Other sources are waste incinerators, utilities, and lead-acid battery manufacturers. The highest air concentrations of lead are usually found near lead smelters.

As a result of EPA's regulatory efforts including the removal of lead from motor vehicle gasoline, levels of lead in the air decreased by 98 percent between 1980 and 2014.

What are the effects of lead on human health?

Once taken into the body, lead distributes throughout the body in the blood and is accumulated in the bones. Depending on the level of exposure, lead can adversely affect the nervous system, kidney function, immune system, reproductive and developmental systems and the cardiovascular system. Lead exposure also affects the oxygen carrying capacity of the blood. The lead effects most commonly encountered in current populations are neurological effects in children and cardiovascular effects (e.g., high blood pressure and heart disease) in adults. Infants and young children are especially sensitive to even low levels of lead, which may contribute to behavioral problems, learning deficits and lowered IQ.

- [Learn more about lead health impacts.](#)

What are the effects of lead on ecosystems?

Lead is persistent in the environment and can be added to soils and sediments through deposition from sources of lead air pollution. Other sources of lead to ecosystems include direct discharge of waste streams to water bodies and mining. Elevated lead in the environment can result in decreased growth and reproductive rates in plants and animals, and neurological effects in vertebrates.

More about Lead

- [What is lead?](#)
- [Where is lead found?](#)

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