



# LEAD

## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH – CONTAMINANTS FACT SHEETS

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LEAD?

Lead is a heavy metal that is found naturally in the environment and can be released as rock wears down and by volcanoes. Human activities such as mining and smelting release additional lead into the environment.

Lead is found in several products, including medical equipment, electronics, lead-acid batteries, ammunition (lead shot), and lead fishing jiggers and sinkers. Leaded gasoline and other lead-containing products (e.g. house

paint, food cans) have been banned in Canada, which has reduced lead concentrations in the environment. For management of lead waste in the NWT, see the GNWT Environment and Natural Resources guidelines (<http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca>).

Although blood lead levels of Canadians have also declined significantly over the past 30 years, evidence indicates that health effects are occurring at levels much lower than were previously thought to be safe. Additional measures to further reduce exposures to lead are needed.

### HOW DOES LEAD AFFECT HUMAN HEALTH?

Low levels of lead exposure may affect fetal brain development and brain functioning in children and infants. This can lead to problems with attention, general activity level, emotional characteristics and social behavior. High levels of lead exposure can cause anemia (unhealthy blood),

headaches, vomiting, stomach pain, poor attention span, learning difficulties, slowed speech development and hyperactivity.

Much of the lead in the human body is stored in bone and takes several years to be eliminated.

### ARE TRADITIONAL FOODS SAFE TO EAT?

Yes! Traditional foods are safe to eat. They are also some of the healthiest foods available. The benefits of consuming traditional foods are much greater than the risks of lead exposure. Check the GNWT Health and Social Services website for current consumption notices (<http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca>). **By following consumption notices, you can safely enjoy all traditional foods.**

Lead exposure may be elevated in traditional foods caught using lead shot, especially if the animal is not cleaned carefully soon after it is shot. It is safer to use steel, bismuth or iron shot to hunt. In the Northwest Territories, **non-toxic shot (not-containing lead) must be used** to hunt migratory game birds. In Canada's National Wildlife Areas, lead shot is prohibited for all hunting, including migratory birds and upland game birds.