



# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TESTING FOR LEAD IN YOUR HOME

YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR A **FREE LEAD RISK ASSESSMENT** IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

**What is the LIRA program?** LIRA stands for Lead Inspection Risk Assessment. Using CDC-safety protocols, certified inspectors enter homes and collect samples of dust, interior and exterior paint, bare soil, and, in some cases, tap water.

**How do I get a LIRA?** To get a LIRA, complete [the eligibility form](#) or contact [info@womenforahealthyenvironment.org](mailto:info@womenforahealthyenvironment.org).

**What resources are available to me?** There are several options for people pursuing lead risk assessments. Complete [the form](#) and we will transfer your information to one of the three main programs in the region:

• **Allegheny Lead Safe Homes Program:** Offered through the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development, this program offers qualifying homeowners and renters with free lead-paint and soil testing throughout their home. If deteriorated lead paint is found, the department hires a certified lead abatement contractor to repair any lead hazards. Qualifications for this program include:

- Must be occupied by families at or below 80% of AMI
- Home must be built before 1978
- Must be located in Allegheny County
- If homeowner, a child under six must live or regularly visit
- If renter, landlord must give priority to low-income families with a child under age six for three years

Household Size	100% Median Area Income
1	\$58,100
2	\$66,400
3	\$74,700
4	\$83,000
5	\$89,650
6	\$96,300
7	\$102,950
8	\$109,600

• **EBLL Home Investigation:** This program is offered through the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD). When a child under the age of six tests positive for a confirmed lead exposure at 5 µg/dl or above, ACHD will offer to conduct a lead exposure inspection which is free.

• **Home Lead Risk Assessment:** This program is offered through Get the Lead Out, Pittsburgh and provides free lead risk assessments to Allegheny County and City of Pittsburgh residents who qualify. Those who fall within the Lead Safe Homes program will be referred to that program, via Action Housing, instead. Qualifications are:

- Home built before 1978
- Both renters and homeowners
- At or above 100% AMI at free or reduced cost
- Priority (but not mandatory) given to those with children under 6 or pregnant individuals

**How does lead get in the home?** According to inspections by the ACHD, the top sources of lead poisoning in our community are dust and paint.

**Why should I get this done?** A lead risk assessment helps identify where the lead hazards are in a home and how significant they are. The program also helps the region better understand the severity of the problem and the risks associated with homes in our community.

**What are the health effects from lead?** Lead is a poison that affects nearly every system in the body, including the brain and nervous system. Lead is especially dangerous to children under the age of six, as their brains and nervous systems are more sensitive to the damaging effects of lead and their growing bodies absorb more lead. There are no effective treatments for the permanent cognitive and behavioral damage that occurs when a toddler has lead poisoning. Lead poisoning contributes to:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Slowed growth and development
- Learning and behavior problems (reduced IQ, ADHD, juvenile delinquency, and criminal behavior)
- Hearing and speech problems
- Other problems can include kidney disease, hypertension, heart disease, anemia, slowed puberty

**Do I have to tell my landlord?** Communication with the property owner is required for programs that fix lead hazards; however, programs that only conduct testing do not require landlord involvement.

**What happens if my landlord doesn't comply?** Any program which requires compliance from a landlord will have the appropriate enforcement mechanisms through the county or other local government agency.

**If lead is found and I don't qualify for free remediation, what can I do?** Every landlord in Pennsylvania must make the repairs needed to keep the rental housing in a safe, sanitary, and livable condition. This warranty applies for serious defects. To protect your rights under the implied warranty law, you must complete the following steps:

**How to assert your right as a tenant to a habitable home** You should try to work the problem out with your landlord in a way that's fair to both of you. If that doesn't work, then you should:

- Notify your landlord of the problem in writing. Your letter should describe the problem(s), ask the landlord to fix it, and say what you will do if it is not fixed within a reasonable time. We can provide a sample letter to you if you wish. Sending this letter by certified mail return receipt requested is a good idea so that you can prove exactly when your landlord learned about the problem. Keep a copy of your letter.
- Give the landlord a "reasonable" time to correct the problem. What is reasonable depends on the situation. The more serious the problem, the sooner it should be fixed. Emergencies such as lack of heat in winter should be fixed very promptly.
- Collect evidence to help your case. If your case ends up in court, you want to be able to show the judge what the problem was, that you gave the landlord notice, and that the problem was not fixed within a reasonable time. Pictures and witnesses are important. If repairs are needed, it is also helpful to get a contractor, plumber, or electrician to give you an estimate to repair the problem(s), if possible.

**What if the landlord does not fix the problem(s)?**

Every case is different. Depending on the special facts in your case, you may be able to do the following:

- Withhold rent.** Reduce the amount of rent that you pay, because of the problem. The amount you should hold back depends on how bad the problem

is—the worse the problem, the more rent you may withhold. It is a good idea to keep the rent that you withhold in a separate bank account, so that you can pay the money later if a court decides you owe rent. Then, if your landlord tries to evict you and the judge rules that the housing conditions were not as bad as you thought, you will be able to pay the rent the judge says you owe.

- Repair and deduct.** Repair the defect yourself or have a professional repair it and deduct the cost from your rent payments. The repairs must be necessary to make the home safe and livable and must be reasonable in price. Get a signed receipt. When your rent comes due, give your landlord a copy of the receipt and pay the difference between your rent and the cost of the repairs. The cost of the repairs cannot be more than the amount of rent you owe for the lease term—for example, if you have a month-to-month lease, the repairs cannot cost more than one month's rent.
- Bring a lawsuit** to get back the rent you paid when your home was not fit or to get compensation for any injuries or other damages you suffer because of the landlord's failure to make repairs.
- Get a court order** requiring the landlord to make repairs.
- Move, without a further duty to pay rent.** If you move out, write to your landlord to give your moving date and to say that you are moving because of the housing conditions that were not corrected. You should only use this option if the unit is totally unlivable. Your landlord may sue you for all the rent remaining due on the lease, so you must be able to show you had no other alternative.
- Contact a Code Enforcement Officer or the Health Department.** Your landlord must obey any housing code which covers the place where you live. In some cases, the local code enforcement officer can make the landlord fix the problem, or at least help prove that the problem really exists. The same is true for the Health Department. Contact your local government to see if help is available.

**Are inspections or assessments safe during COVID?**

Each of the inspectors maintains proper social distancing from the members of the house, wears a mask and obeys all recommended guidelines.



**Get the Lead Out, Pittsburgh**