

A Toxic Legacy: Confronting Lead Poisoning In Baltimore

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Vacant rowhouses, 2017.

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Baltimore is at the center of the lead crisis in the U.S., and generations of Baltimoreans have been poisoned by the heavy metal. How did lead exposure become such a drastic problem here in Baltimore? And how can the city deal with lead poisoning in a lasting and comprehensive way?

Lead is ubiquitous in Baltimore, and despite a dip in [reported lead poisoning cases](#), it remains a serious and ongoing problem. Exposure to lead can cause learning difficulties, developmental delays, irritability,

seizures, high blood pressure, mood disorders, and death. Lead poisoning has also been linked to [violent crime](#), brain damage, and ADHD.

While there has been growing national awareness around the presence of lead in the water of cities like Flint, the most common way that people are exposed to lead in Baltimore is through [old lead-based paint](#) in rental and owner-occupied homes. Although Baltimore was the first city in the U.S. to ban the use of lead paint in new housing, toxic paint and dust still linger in homes across the city, particularly in [hypersegregated African-American neighborhoods](#).

And old paint isn't the only way that Baltimoreans are exposed to lead. Lead is present in the plumbing of many buildings, in the soil near former industrial sites, and the air surrounding South Baltimore's trash-burning plant and medical waste incinerator. It can also be found in everything from car batteries and makeup to toys and pottery.

On this episode of *Future City*, we explore how lead poisoning became such a crisis in Baltimore, discuss why it disproportionately affects African-Americans, find out how the city has approached lead abatement and lead poisoning testing and treatment, and learn how other cities are finding the funding to take on the massive task of safely getting lead out of homes and the environment.