

SYMPTOMS OF LEAD POISONING IN CHILDREN

LEAD IS A VERY POWERFUL POISON.

Normal level – There is no safe level of lead but levels below 10 micrograms/decilitre do not normally require treatment.

Elevated level – Above 40 necessitates an immediate evacuation and medical treatment. No return to the contaminated area is permitted.

Very High Level – Many camp children have levels above what the lead care analyser II used by the WHO could measure. This is above 65. Some are believed from their symptoms to have levels as high as 120.

There are many possible symptoms of lead poisoning, and all of these are observed in some children in these camps. Lead can affect many different parts of the body. Over time, even low levels of lead exposure can harm a child's mental development. The possible health problems get worse as the level of lead in the blood gets higher. Possible complications include:

- Reduced IQ
- Slowed body growth
- Hearing problems
- Behaviour or attention problems
- Failure at school
- Kidney damage

The symptoms of lead poisoning increase as level get higher and may include:

- Irritability
- Aggressive behaviour
- Low appetite and energy
- Difficulty sleeping
- Headaches
- Reduced sensations
- Loss of previous developmental skills (in young children)
- Anaemia
- Constipation
- Abdominal pain and cramping (usually the first sign of a high, toxic dose of lead poison)
- Very high levels may cause vomiting, staggering gait, muscle weakness, seizures, or coma, death.

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