



Questions and Answers about Lead in Older Vinyl Mini Blinds

Contra Costa Health Services / Lead Poisoning Prevention Project

Why are vinyl mini blinds hazardous?

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) found that older, imported vinyl (plastic) mini blinds contain high amounts of lead which can be hazardous to young children. These blinds were manufactured before mid-1997 and imported from China, Indonesia, Taiwan and Mexico. Manufacturers used lead in blinds to stabilize the vinyl and make it less brittle. Lead dust forms on the blinds, particularly when they are exposed to heat and sun.

Children get lead by mouthing the blinds or by touching the blinds and then putting their fingers in their mouth. Children under the age of six are especially vulnerable to lead, which can cause problems with learning, behavior, growth, and hearing.

How dangerous are these blinds?

The amount of lead in the older vinyl mini blinds tested by CPSC varied greatly. Some blinds had enough lead that a child ingesting dust from less than one square inch of the mini blind daily, for about 15 to 30 days, could have a blood lead level above the level of concern for children.

Like any source of lead, the level of risk depends on the amount of lead in the blinds and on how much the child actually takes in. Intake is different for each child. In the few cases where vinyl mini blinds were believed to have caused lead poisoning, children had mouthed the blinds directly.

How can I tell if my older mini blinds are vinyl?

- ◆ Examine the brackets that attach your mini blinds to the wall. If the brackets are plastic, you probably have vinyl mini blinds. (Metal blinds usually have metal brackets, to which a magnet will stick.)
- ◆ The slats on vinyl blinds will either crack or spring back when you bend them. Metal blinds will stay bent.
- ◆ Vinyl blinds are thicker than metal but let more light through. The light from a flashlight can be seen through a vinyl mini blind, but not a metal one.

What should I do if I have older vinyl mini blinds in my home?

The CPSC recommends that you remove older (pre-1997) vinyl mini blinds from your home, especially if the blinds are located where children can easily touch them.

Once the blinds are removed, make sure the replacements are lead-free. The blinds may be labeled “No Lead Added” or “Non-Leaded Formula” or you may need to contact the manufacturer. You may also choose to replace the blinds with new metal blinds, new wood blinds or other window coverings.

If you have children under age 6 in your home, and you are concerned that they may have ingested lead from vinyl mini blinds, ask your child’s doctor or clinic to order a blood test for lead.

How do I remove the blinds safely?

Although lead will not pass through your skin, you should wear disposable rubber gloves while handling the blinds.

- ◆ If you have curtains hanging over your blinds, take the curtains down first.
- ◆ Draw the blinds up as far as they will go, so they are bunched up tightly against the top of the window.
- ◆ Pull the blinds carefully out of their brackets.
- ◆ Cut through the slats of the blinds with a sharp pair of scissors to prevent the blinds from being reused.
- ◆ Wrap the blinds in plastic garbage bags and dispose of them in your regular household trash.
- ◆ Wash the window sill and surrounding window area with soapy water and flush the waste water down the toilet.
- ◆ As an extra safety measure, you may want to steam clean the carpets or wet wash the floors near the areas where the blinds were hanging.
- ◆ Wash your hands with soap and water when done.

Can I wash the lead off the blinds instead of getting rid of them?

Washing does not remove the lead hazard from vinyl mini blinds. Tests done by the CPSC showed that lead dust quickly formed again on blinds after they were washed. The safest long-term solution is to remove the blinds.

Do other kinds of blinds have lead?

The CPSC did not find lead in aluminum (metal) mini blinds. Most vertical blinds (those with slats running from top to bottom) are manufactured in the U.S. and do not contain lead.

Can I test the blinds to be sure they contain lead?

The home lead test kits that are available at most hardware and home improvement stores may indicate whether there is lead in your mini blinds. The CPSC does not recommend using these kits to test for lead in mini blinds because such kits haven't been evaluated for testing blinds. Instead, the CPSC recommends removing the older vinyl mini blinds from your home.

What if I am renting a home that has older vinyl mini blinds?

Share this information about the hazards of lead in vinyl mini blinds with your landlord, and urge him/her to replace older blinds in your home, especially if there are children under age 6 living there. Your landlord may be willing to replace the blinds voluntarily, but currently there are no laws that require your landlord to remove the blinds. Health and Safety code sections 105255 and 105256 make it illegal to create a lead hazard (including dust).

Can I get a refund for my vinyl mini blinds?

Because the CPSC did not issue a formal recall, retailers were not required to refund money for vinyl mini blinds that were returned. At the time that the CPSC issued the consumer advisory (June 1997), some retailers voluntarily gave refunds or credit for blinds that were returned to them. Policies varied widely by retailer and location.

Information adapted from "Questions & Answers About Lead in Vinyl Mini Blinds", California Department of Health Services, Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch, July, 1996.