

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS

Mean* blood lead levels for U.S. workers 18-74 years of age,
by sex and potential exposure to metallic lead, 1976-1980

Observed potential workplace exposure to metallic lead	Sex	Average ¹ blood lead level, $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ (SE)	Percentage ¹ workers with blood lead levels > 30 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ (SE)
Present	Male	17.9 (0.34)	5.8 (0.66)
	Female	12.3 (0.36)	1.1 (0.68)
Absent	Male	15.5 (0.36)	1.2 (0.51)
	Female	11.5 (0.28)	(-) ²

*Data sources: The National Center for Health Statistics' *National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (1976-1980)*. The NIOSH National Occupational Hazard Survey was used to identify workers in types of workplaces with observed potential exposure to lead.

¹The estimated standard errors ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$) of the estimates are in parentheses next to the National estimated averages.

²This percentage and its standard error are estimated to be zero. The true percentage is probably greater than zero.

Data collected during NHANES II indicate that blood lead levels were significantly higher among adults working in occupations with potential exposure to lead than in occupations without such potential exposures. Cigarette smokers had consistently higher blood lead determinations than nonsmokers, and men had higher levels than women.

The NHANES II blood lead determinations were compared with data previously collected during the National Occupational Hazard Survey (NOHS), conducted in the period 1972-1974. NOHS collected information on potential exposures of workers to chemical and physical agents in a probability sample survey of approximately 5,000 workplaces across the United States. These data indicated occupations associated with potential exposure to lead in the workplace. The results of blood lead determinations among workers, ages 18-74 years, surveyed by NHANES II were divided into two groups: those for persons working in settings previously identified by NOHS as affording potential exposure to lead and those for persons working in settings without such potential exposure.

The data indicate that exposure in the workplace has had and may continue to have a significant impact on blood lead levels of adults in the United States. Although blood lead levels among workers in the lead industries have declined in recent years, they are still significantly higher than among lead workers in the United Kingdom, Sweden, or Finland.

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