



Environmental Health Information

How to reduce accidental intake of contaminated soils

May 2006

How can you be exposed to contaminants in soil?

While it is possible to breathe in contaminated dust, accidental ingestion of contaminated soil is a greater concern. Accidental ingestion of contaminated soil may occur when normal activities leave soil on our fingers and hands, increasing the chance that contaminants could be swallowed. Children who live and play in a contaminated area can have more exposure than adults. Preschool-age children are more likely to be exposed because of their frequent hand to mouth activity. Dust from contaminated soil can be tracked into the house on shoes and can end up on indoor surfaces and toys.

What can you do to prevent or reduce contact with contaminants?

Keep hands clean.

- ❖ Wash children's hands and faces, especially before eating and bedtime. Keep their fingernails short and clean. Clean toys or objects that children put in their mouths.
- ❖ Adults should wash their hands before feeding their children, smoking, eating or drinking.

Try to reduce soil dust in the house.

- ❖ Take off your shoes when you enter your home to prevent tracking contaminated soil inside. Store outdoor shoes at entryways. Remember that pets can carry in soil dust on their paws.
- ❖ Vacuum carpeting, rugs and upholstery. Regular vacuuming will keep dust from accumulating.
- ❖ Dust with a damp cloth.
- ❖ Scrub tile and linoleum floors and wash windowsills.
- ❖ Keep windows closed on windy days, at least on the windward side of the house. This will keep dust from blowing inside.
- ❖ Wash gardening gloves and clothes separately from family clothes.
- ❖ Change the furnace filter every 3 months.

Reduce outdoor activities that stir up dust.

- ❖ Seed or sod bare areas in your yard. Bushes and grass help keep soil in place and reduce the amount of dust in the air.
- ❖ Minimize mowing over areas of sparse lawn during periods of dry weather.
- ❖ Avoid dirt biking, mountain biking, ATV use or any other recreational activities that disturb the soil.
- ❖ Avoid digging or disturbing soil. If it cannot be avoided, keep the soil moist to reduce making dust.

Take special care when gardening or harvesting.

- ❖ Use gardening gloves (leather is better than cloth) when gardening to keep contaminated dust out from under fingernails and reduce the chance that soil on fingers and hands could be swallowed.
- ❖ Keep garden tools and gloves in one area of the garage or shed.
- ❖ Periodically rinse tools off.
- ❖ All plants used for traditional or cultural purposes should be rinsed off carefully, even if they will not be used as food.
- ❖ Use the same tips when harvesting wild vegetation (use gloves and rinse tools).

Give children a safe play area.

- ❖ Build a sandbox with a bottom and fill it with clean sand. Cover it when not in use to keep out contaminated dust.
- ❖ Find other places for children to play.

Prepare food carefully to reduce the amount of contaminants.

- ❖ Thoroughly wash and peel all home-grown vegetables before eating or cooking them. Or, if possible, grow vegetables in a raised garden bed filled with clean soil.
- ❖ Rinse the dust off of wild vegetation carefully before using.

For more information contact:

MDH/Site Assessment and Consultation: (651) 201-4897 or 1 (800) 657-3908, press “4” and leave a message.

To request this document in another format, call (651) 201-5000, TDD: (651) 201-5797 or, The Minnesota Relay Service at 1 (800) 627-3529.

This information sheet was prepared in cooperation with the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.



Minnesota Department of Health ■ Division of Health ■ Site Assessment and Consultation Unit

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If you would like a copy of this fact sheet “How to reduce accidental intake of contaminated soils” in Spanish, Somali or Hmong, please visit www.epa.gov/region5/sites/cmcheartland or contact Cheryl Allen, EPA Community Involvement Coordinator at 312-353-6196 or 800-621-8431 Ext 36196. Or you can email your request to her at allen.cheryl@epa.gov.

Si le gustaría una copia de este informe “Como reducir la toma accidental de suelos contaminados” en Español, Somalí, o Hmong visite por favor la pagina de Internet www.epa.gov/region5/sites/cmcheartland o comuníquese con Cheryl Allen, coordinadora de participación de la comunidad del EPA, al (312) 353-6196 o al (800) 621-8431 ext. 36196. Usted también puede enviar sus preguntas al correo electrónico allen.cheryl@epa.gov.

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