



IT'S YOUR HEALTH

Safe Use of Arts and Crafts Materials

The Issue



If you are an artist or craftsperson, you may be working with **materials** that have the potential to harm your health.

It is important to protect yourself by taking proper precautions, whether you are working with these materials to earn money or simply for your own enjoyment.

Potential Health Hazards

You might assume that all arts materials are safe to work with, since these materials are readily available in stores. But some of these materials can be hazardous if you do not follow all of the safety instructions on the product label.

It is impossible to list all the potential hazards of using all arts and crafts materials, however, the following examples highlight some things that could be harmful:

- If you draw or paint, you might inhale dust from dry pigments or fumes from the chemical solvents used to clean brushes. Spray paints can produce mists that are harmful when inhaled. Many of these products are also flammable.
- Some artists' paints for adult use can contain a variety of **harmful chemicals** such as lead and cadmium.
- Some photo-processing solutions used in developers, fixers, stop baths and intensifiers can irritate skin, be poisonous if ingested and may produce dangerous fumes.
- In jewellery-making and enamelling, you could inhale dusts or fumes during soldering, pickling, casting or finishing.
- In stained **glass work**, you could inhale **lead fumes** when soldering glass pieces



together or you could be exposed to lead when handling lead came or leaded solders. You could also inhale hazardous fumes when using acid fluxes during soldering, or do serious damage to your lungs by breathing in powdered glass when using an electric glass grinder.

- In woodworking, you could seriously damage your lungs by continuously inhaling wood dust. Some of the solvents and adhesives used in stripping, gluing and finishing can also harm your health.
- Some materials that are safe when used on their own can produce hazardous fumes or materials when they are mixed with bleaches, acids, solvents, household cleaners or other substances.
- Some arts materials can cause chemical burns or illness if you spill them on your skin, get them in your eyes, or breathe or swallow even a bit of them just once.
- Repeated exposure to small amounts of certain materials can cause a variety of health problems, and prolonged exposure to some substances could damage your internal organs.

Anyone working with [hazardous materials](#) should take precautions. This advice is even more important for pregnant women, and anyone who takes medication or has a medical condition. Remember too that the effects of poisons are more serious for young children than for adults. Young children are also more likely to be exposed to hazardous arts and crafts materials because they are

curious and have a natural habit of putting things into their mouths.

Minimizing Your Risk

To protect yourself from potential health problems, learn all you can about the materials and techniques you are using. Look for safer alternatives, and do not try anything new until you have looked into the potential hazards. Take classes, ask an experienced professional, call the manufacturer's toll-free number (which is usually on the product label or package), or go to the library.



In addition, follow these safety guidelines:

- Read the [safety instructions](#) on your arts materials every time you use them. Follow the instructions exactly as stated.
 - When buying arts materials for children, make sure the products being used are [labelled](#) for children's use.
 - Keep materials in their original containers whenever possible. If you transfer materials, make sure you put labels on the new containers. Keep the original container nearby.
 - Don't work near food preparation areas, and store all materials away from food and drink. Do not eat, drink, smoke or apply make-up in your work area.
- Don't wear [contact lenses](#) when you work. They can trap dust or splashed liquids, which could damage your eyes.
 - When using solvents, acids or materials that produce dusts, work with the smallest quantities possible.
 - Avoid touching your mouth with your hands, brushes, or other materials or tools when working.
 - [Wash your hands](#) after you finish working.
 - Use a closed mixing box to control dust from powders, and clean up with a wet mop to avoid stirring up dust.
 - [Use proper ventilation](#). Depending on the materials you use, this could mean bringing in fresh air, or using a fan to draw fumes away from you. For some hazardous procedures, you may need to use a laboratory hood or a spray booth.
 - Make sure you have a source of running water near your work area.
 - Install a [smoke detector](#) in your work area and keep a fire extinguisher close at hand.
 - Use protective equipment as appropriate, such as:
 - goggles to protect your eyes from splashes or flying splinters;
 - ear plugs to protect against loud or continuous noises;
 - rubberized gloves to avoid getting solvents or acids on your skin (ordinary household rubber gloves may not provide enough protection against certain hazardous materials); and



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- dust masks or respirators to prevent breathing in dusts and fumes.



- Do not allow children or pets into your work area unless they are carefully supervised.
- Keep your work place neat. If you do not have a permanent work place that you can lock up, put away any hazardous materials when you are not working.
- Store hazardous materials out of the sight and reach of children and pets. Do not store hazardous materials in a refrigerator used for food or drinks.
- Keep the phone number of your nearest [Poison Control Centre](#) handy so you can call right away for advice if there is an emergency.
- Contact your municipal waste facility for information on how to safely dispose of any hazardous waste materials.

Finally, if you suffer headaches, dizzy spells, severe mood swings or other

symptoms of illness while you are working, leave the project for a while to see if you feel better. These symptoms could be warning signs that you need to take additional steps to protect your health when working with arts and crafts materials. If symptoms persist or return while you are away from the work areas, get medical advice.

Health Canada's Role

[Health Canada](#) advises consumers of the information they need to use chemical products safely for their intended purpose. As part of this work, Health Canada sets out the criteria manufacturers must follow when they classify, label and package their products. These criteria take into consideration the hazards associated with products and the potential risks of using products. Health Canada also investigates consumer complaints about the safety of products and has the authority to take regulated products off the market when needed for safety reasons.

Need More Info?

For more information visit the following Health Canada web sections :

- Health Canada's [Consumer Product Safety](#) web section at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/index-eng.php>

- Contact your nearest [Health Canada Consumer Product Safety Office](#) at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/contact/cps-spc/index-eng.php>
or call 1-866-662-0666
- Health Canada's Healthy Environments for Children, [Using Arts and Crafts Materials Safely](#) at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/pubs/child-enfant/safe-sain/index-eng.php#art>
- Stay Safe – [An Education Program about Hazard Symbols](#) at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/house-domes/chem-chim/hazard-danger-eng.php>
- Health Canada's [Lead Information Package](#) at:
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/contaminants/lead-plomb/asked_questions-questions_posees-eng.php
- *It's Your Health*, [Lead-based Paint](#) at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/prod/paint-peinture-eng.php>
- *It's You Health*, [Lead Crystalware](#) at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/prod/crystal-cristal-eng.php>

For more information visit:

- The Canadian Child Care Federation, [Safety in the Arts](#) at:
http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/docs/cccf/RS_21-e.pdf
- US Department of Health and Human Services, [Keeping the](#)

Artist Safe: [Resources about the Hazards of Arts and Crafts Materials](#) at:
<http://sis.nlm.nih.gov/enviro/arthazards.html>

For safety information about food, health and consumer products visit the [Safe Consumers](#) website at:
www.health.gc.ca/consumer

For more articles on health and safety issues go to the *It's Your Health* web section at:
www.health.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at
1-866-225-0709
or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*