FACTS ABOUT CADMIUM

What is cadmium?
Cadmium is a natural element in the earth's crust. It is usually found as a mineral combined with other elements such as oxygen (cadmium oxide), chlorine (cadmium chloride), or sulfur (cadmium sulfate, cadmium sulfide). All soils and rocks, including coal and mineral fertilizers, contain some cadmium. Most cadmium used in the United States is extracted during the production of other metals like zinc, lead, and copper. Cadmium does not corrode easily and has many uses, including batteries, pigments, metal coatings, and plastics.

How might I be exposed to cadmium?
Eating foods containing cadmium; low levels are found in all foods (highest levels are found in leafy vegetables, grains, legumes, and kidney meat). Smoking cigarettes or breathing cigarette smoke. Breathing contaminated workplace air. Drinking contaminated water. Living near industrial facilities which release cadmium into the air.

How can cadmium affect my health?
Breathing high levels of cadmium can severely damage the lungs. Eating food or drinking water with very high levels severely irritates the stomach, leading to vomiting and diarrhea. Long-term exposure to lower levels of cadmium in air, food, or water leads to a buildup of cadmium in the kidneys and possible kidney disease. Other long-term effects are lung damage and fragile bones.

How can families reduce the risk of exposure to cadmium?
Do not allow children to play with batteries. Dispose of nickel-cadmium batteries properly. Cadmium is a component of tobacco smoke. Avoid smoking and smoking in enclosed spaces like inside the home or car in order to limit exposure to children and other family members. If you work with cadmium, use all safety precautions to avoid carrying cadmium-containing dust home from work on your clothing, skin, hair, or tools. A balanced diet can reduce the amount of cadmium taken into the body from food and drink.

Is there a medical test to determine whether I've been exposed to cadmium?
Cadmium can be measured in blood, urine, hair, or nails. Urinary cadmium has been shown to accurately reflect the amount of cadmium in the body. The amount of cadmium in your blood shows your recent exposure to cadmium. The amount of cadmium in your urine shows both your recent and your past exposure.

Where can I get more information about Cadmium?

Contact DSHS Health Assessment and Toxicology:

- 1-800-588-1248
- epitox@dshs.texas.gov
- dshs.texas.gov/epitox/hat.shtm