



Australian  
National  
University

## **Frequently asked questions**

### **Why haven't the buildings been checked regularly for hazards?**

The University undertook a full hazardous materials (HAZMAT) assessment of the childcare centres on campus in 2015 – the report is publicly available. Since then the University has carried out ongoing maintenance at the childcare centres. Unfortunately, the condition of the paint deteriorated faster than the University expected and we are now in the process of remediating these issues. The University is developing a comprehensive maintenance plan to address the ongoing management of any hazardous materials at the childcare centres. This plan will be made available to each of the childcare centres.

### **How often will the buildings be inspected in the future?**

Once all current issues have been remediated the buildings will be visually inspected every six months. At any time, management of the childcare centres can report issues or concerns to the University.

### **How can I report an issue?**

If parents or staff notice any issue they should raise it with centre management who will report it back to the University.

### **What guarantee is there that the University will fix the issue?**

The safety and wellbeing of the children and staff in the childcare centres is a priority. The University has engaged independent, external, environmental hygienists to assess the centres, and has contacted ACT Health for an assessment where any elevated readings have been found in soil tests. The University is reviewing the current processes around monitoring and reporting of maintenance issues at the childcare centres to identify any gaps in the current processes. The University will work with childcare centre directors over the next two months to streamline the logging and action of maintenance requests. Priority will always be given to issues that may affect the health and safety of children and staff.

**Is the University planning to remove all hazardous materials from childcare centres?**

A number of child care centres are in very old buildings that can be difficult to maintain to modern standards for the long term. Hazardous materials like lead-containing paint and asbestos can be safely maintained where it remains intact and not damaged. However, the University is considering the long-term plan for our childcares centres on campus, which may include relocation or new buildings. Full removal of all hazardous material would require the closure of the buildings for an extended period of time.

**What has the University done to ensure the safety of children and staff while you are remediating the current issues?**

The University has used certified environmental specialists to assess and remediate the flaking lead-containing paint. We have isolated any affected area immediately upon discovery of flaking lead-containing paint. There has been air monitoring prior to and during the remediation works. All work has been done outside of operating hours, including on weekends, to minimise risk to children. At the conclusion of the remediation work, the site is thoroughly cleaned by a qualified hazardous removal team, independent inspection is undertaken and a clearance certificate obtained from an environmental hygienist.

**How can you be sure the interiors of the building are safe?**

The interiors do contain lead based paints and asbestos that is encapsulated in non-lead containing paint. The University engaged an independent environmental hygienist to check the interior of each of the childcare centres. They have not identified any cause for concern that would require children to be kept from the areas. The full report from the hygienist will be made available once it is received.

**Will the university replace toys removed or damaged as a result of the assessment?**

Yes.

**Why did the University say that the centres had been assessed and that other than HECC there were no issues?**

The initial assessment of the centres only identified an issue in areas that children have access to at the HECC. However, further investigation with the removal of hedges and shrubs at UPCC over the weekend of May 13 revealed extensive flaking lead-based paint. The area was immediately closed off, extensive testing undertaken and remedial work begun.

### **Why didn't the University take soil samples from all the childcare centres?**

Lead-based paint does not pose a risk if it is encapsulated in non-lead containing paint. Testing is only done where there is evidence of flaking lead-based paint. Best practice is to then remediate and take soil samples for testing.

Because two out of 37 soil samples returned elevated readings at the Heritage Child Care Centre, it was inspected by the ACT Health Protection Service and they have confirmed that there is no ongoing risk to the children in the centre.

As a precaution, the chip samples were taken from interior walls of the buildings to test the levels of lead in the known lead paint which is currently encapsulated in non-lead containing paint.

### **How can I keep my child safe from lead?**

Lead is a naturally occurring metal found in the ground. People can be exposed to lead in the environment through food, drinking water, air, dust, soil and some consumer products, like lead-containing paint.

The NHMRC has published helpful information for parents on ways to keep your children safe from lead exposure.

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/media/releases/2009/helping-keep-your-child-safe-lead>