This week we focus our attention on the devastating effect that lead can have on human health.

We need to remember that lead is highly toxic – especially for children.

Lead poisoning kills more than 140,000 people each year.

It leaves 600,000 more with intellectual disabilities. There is evidence that lead exposure can also result in antisocial behaviour.

And it can lead to a host of other health issues, ranging from anaemia to kidney problems, from hypertension to damage to reproductive organs.

Some of the physical, neurological and behavioural effects of lead are irreversible.

From 19-25 October WHO joins partners around the world to mark the International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week of Action. Our goal is to “Eliminate lead paint”.

We want to alert people to the dangers of lead paint, and to encourage them to use safer alternatives.

Only then can we keep our children safe, because there is no safe level of exposure to lead.

Lead may be found in the home, on toys, furniture and on other objects. Decaying lead paint on walls, furniture and other interior surfaces creates contaminated dust that young children can easily ingest.

The good news is that exposure to lead paint can be entirely stopped through a range of measures to restrict the production and use of lead paint.

In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development governments called for the phase-out of lead paint. So far, about 40 countries have achieved this. The Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint, co-led by WHO and UNEP, has
set a goal to eliminate lead paint by 2020, with a target of 70 countries by 2015.

WHO is calling on every country to ensure national actions to eliminate lead paint and to manage chemicals in a sustainable way. To keep us and our children safe.