

Bird Safety Corner

While many metals are toxic to birds, lead and zinc are the most commonly found in the home and are most responsible for companion bird poisonings.

Lead

Lead is the most commonly reported cause of companion bird poisoning. Information on the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment can be found here:

www.beautyofbirds.com/heavymetalpoisoningbirds.html

Most people have probably heard of **lead paint**, which was formally banned in household paint, furniture, and toys in the U.S. in 1977. If your house is older than that, you might still have lead paint on your walls, including behind wallpaper, so be aware that parrots might chew on the walls and ingest toxic levels of lead.



There are many other potential sources of lead exposure in your home. Household items which may contain lead include **drapery weights**, **ceramic dishware** (usually decorative), **costume jewelry**, **stained glass**, **antiqued mirrors**, **wrought iron welding**, **solder**, **putty**, and **batteries**, among others. **Fishing weights** and **shotgun pellets** are also made of lead. Lead shotgun pellets, in fact, are the number one cause of illness and death for California condors! Take a good look around your house

critically for sources of lead which could poison your bird. Keep in mind that "lead" pencils are actually made of graphite, not lead, so will not cause lead poisoning.



One often overlooked source of lead which your birds might be exposed to is **wine bottle corks**. Corks are wrapped in lead foil, and if a bottle of wine is stored on its side, wine may enter the cork and leach lead out of the foil. If you open the bottle and give the cork to your bird to play with, they might ingest toxic amounts of lead (not to mention the alcohol!). So don't give any corks from actual wine bottles to your birds to be on the safe side, even if they appear clean and uncontaminated.



Zinc

Another common household bird toxin is zinc. Information on symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment can be found here and at the previous link:

www.exoticpetvet.net/avian/zinc.html

There are many sources of zinc in the home. **Galvanized wire** is a major source of toxicity, particularly in outside aviaries. Electroplated galvanized metal is safe, but hot-dipped is not. **Cages, clips, and toys** may be made of hot-dipped wire. **Rusted wire** is also toxic. Most cage manufacturers use safe paints and powder coating these days, but if a cage chips, zinc may be exposed, so you should have any **paint flakes or chips** tested for zinc. If you have an escape artist bird (I'm talking to you cockatoo companions out there!) and you use a **padlock**, keep in mind that it may have zinc which can be toxic to curious beaks. Never use galvanized metal food dishes.



Other sources of zinc in the house include **nails**, some **paperclips**, and all **pennies** made after 1981. Since it is hard to figure out which nails and paperclips have zinc, it's best to avoid letting your birds near any of them.



Zinc-containing coins are another reason that money shouldn't be thrown into zoo enclosures and ponds! Additional sources of zinc in the home include **duct tape**, **twist ties**, **remote controls** (not that birds EVER play with remote controls LOL), **flooring** and **floor adhesives**, **paints**, and **varnishes**. The adhesive found on **paper towel and toilet paper rolls** also contains zinc, so these are not safe toys for birds.

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