

- Lead poisoning remains the most significant environmental threat to a child's health and well-being.
- In 2014, there were 15 Washtenaw County children who had a venous blood lead level of 5 mcg/dL or higher, which is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's blood lead reference level.
- According to 2014 Kids Count data, only 35% of children aged 1-2 years receiving Medicaid were tested for lead, even though Michigan policy mandates that Medicaid-covered children be tested for blood lead at 12 and 24 months of age.

Lead Poisoning Prevention

Protecting children from lead poisoning is an important public health initiative. Lead interferes with normal body functions and exposure to it can have significant and long-lasting impact on a child's physical and emotional development. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect a child's IQ, ability to pay attention and academic achievement.

The recent water crisis in Flint has raised awareness of the hazards of lead exposure. Sources of drinking water in our area, whether groundwater or surface water, do not contain high levels of naturally occurring lead. However, lead can leach into water supplies through lead pipe and lead-based solder. The use of these products has been phased out over time, so they are more likely to be present in homes built prior to 1986.

While water can be a possible source of lead poisoning for children, the primary danger is exposure to lead-based paint and the associated dust. In fact, children are most likely to get lead poisoning from lead paint in homes built before 1978. Other sources of exposure include engaging in hobbies or practicing cultural or religious customs that use lead-based products, using folk remedies that contain lead, using imported products that contain lead, working in a job where lead is used and contact with lead-contaminated soil.

Adults can be affected by lead poisoning, but it most often occurs in young children. Children have rapidly developing brains, their bodies absorb lead faster and they have more frequent hand-to-mouth behaviors than adults. Children living in poverty, children living in older homes, foreign adoptees, immigrants, refugees, migrants, those in foster care and pregnant women are at greatest risk.

Lead poisoning is often difficult to detect, as it often has no or very vague symptoms, or the symptoms mimic other illnesses, such as the flu. Some early signs of lead poisoning might include hyperactivity, irritability, poor appetite, sleep disturbances, constipation or a reduced attention span. A blood lead test is the only way to confirm that a child has an elevated lead level.

Local health care providers should order a lead test for any child under age six who is covered by Medicaid or who has any other identified risk. Parents who have concerns should talk to their health care provider or Washtenaw County Public Health.

The most important step that parents, doctors, public health practitioners and others can take is to prevent lead exposure before it occurs.

What is WCPH doing to address this issue?

- In April 2016, WCPH began offering blood lead testing services at our Towner clinic. To date, we have tested 149 Medicaid-enrolled, at-risk children for lead.
- We provide nursing case management services to families who have children with venous blood lead levels above 9 mcg/dL. Services include home visits by a nurse and coordination of an environmental investigation to determine the source of the lead.
- In collaboration with nursing students from the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University, we will be providing lead poisoning prevention education to families whose children have blood lead levels of 5 to 9 mcg/dL.
- We participate in a Pediatric Workgroup that is focused on increasing lead testing rates across Washtenaw County.
- Lead water testing bottles are available at Environmental Health for \$17. Approximately 65 water samples for lead were processed in 2015. All but one (3 ppb) had results that were non-detect.

For more information:

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