

Childhood Lead Poisoning

Lead is a heavy metal found in the earth's crust that does not break down in the environment.¹ When someone inhales or swallows lead, they can suffer serious health consequences, up to and including death.²

WHAT IS CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends intervention for children with a blood lead level presence of 3.5µg/dL (micrograms per deciliter).³ Currently, Georgia law defines an elevated blood lead level at 10µg/dL (or more) of lead within the body.⁴ Children under age 6 are at the greatest risk of lead poisoning.⁵

EFFECTS OF LEAD POISONING ON CHILDREN

Children's bodies absorb lead more easily, affecting brain and other physical development, like in organs and the nervous system.² Even low levels of lead can result in:



Speech, language, and behavioral problems



Learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder



Lower IQ



Nervous system damage



Prenatal exposure can cause **miscarriage**, premature birth, and damage to baby's brain, kidneys, and nervous system⁶



In 2020, 94,484 of Georgia's children were screened for lead poisoning. Of those, **1,942 children** had **lead poisoning measuring 5 ug/dL or more.**⁸

DISPARITIES ON LEAD EXPOSURE

According to 2019 Georgia Department of Public Health data, childhood lead poisoning is more prevalent in Asian, Black, and Multi-racial children than White children.⁷

All children enrolled in Medicaid or PeachCare for Kids are supposed to be tested for lead poisoning at age 12 months, 24 months, and – if they haven't yet been tested – between 36 and 72 months.

DID YOU KNOW?

Higher levels of lead - also called elevated blood lead levels - can cause coma, convulsions, intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, seizures, and death. Elevated blood lead levels can require expensive medical treatment and exacerbate health conditions.¹⁰

Where is Lead Found?



Paint

Older homes and buildings are more likely to have lead-based paint. While the use of lead in residential paints was banned in 1978, lead is present in many buildings built prior to that date.¹¹

Water

This can be caused by corrosion of plumbing materials (e.g. pipes and fixtures). Homes built before 1986 are more likely to have lead pipes, fixtures and solder.¹³



Toys and Other Items

May be present in those imported from other countries.¹⁵



Soil

Yards and playgrounds may become contaminated from exterior lead-based paint flakes, industrial sources, or even contaminated sites. Also, lead is naturally occurring and can be found in high concentrations in some areas.¹²

Small metal objects

Which can be swallowed by children.¹⁴



Herbal or folk remedies

Greta and azarcon, which are traditional Hispanic medicines, as well as other traditional medicines from India, China, Bhutan and others can contain lead.¹²

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY



Have your child tested

Get your home checked for lead hazards



Test your water

Clean regularly



Remove shoes or wipe off soil before entering house

REPORTING LEAD HAZARDS IN YOUR HOME

Landlords and home sellers are required to provide information on any known lead-based painting hazards in homes built before 1978.¹⁶

Sellers must provide a 10-day period for the buyer to test the home for lead.¹⁷

FOUR THINGS TO DO TO HELP LOWER YOUR CHILD'S LEAD LEVELS¹⁸

1. Make a plan with your child's doctor.
2. Find the lead in your home using a licensed lead inspector.
3. Clean and dust windowsills, baseboards, and floors.
4. Eat foods high in calcium, iron, and vitamin C. These vitamins and minerals help keep lead out of the body.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Update Georgia's confirmed elevated lead level definition from 10µg/dL law to the most current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendation of 3.5µg/dL (DPH)
- Update Georgia law to comply with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention standards for environmental intervention (home investigation) (5µg/dL) and recommended interventions (DPH)
- Expand Georgia law to include blood lead level monitoring and mitigation strategies for women of childbearing age (DPH) and children under six years of age
- Develop and implement multi-year lead test and mitigation strategies in built environments and drinking water at schools, childcare facilities, and other non-home locations where children spend time.* Explore federal and other public or private funding mechanisms to cover costs.
- Expand partnerships to increase blood lead level testing sites (e.g., clinics, labs, point of care) (DPH)
- Encourage Care Management Organizations (CMOs) to increase well-child visits and mandatory Medicaid child lead screenings.** Ensure that Medicaid / DCH is accurately monitoring and reporting lead screening. (DCH)
- Assess and address built environment for each child whose blood lead level is equal to or greater than the CDC action level, especially for children under 3 years old (DPH, GEPCD)

*Lead testing and mitigation strategies for drinking water may consider the Georgia Lead Poisoning Prevention Act of 1994, which addresses lead-based paint.

**Medicaid federally requires that every state provides at least 80% of Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment recipients with timely medical screens, including lead screening for under age six.²⁰ Federal data show that from 2015 to 2019, Medicaid lead screening rates steadily declined in Georgia (from approximately 108,000 to 96,000) for ages 0-6.²¹ Note Medicaid reported that this data was incorrectly reported so numbers will vary.²²

Sources for Childhood Lead Poisoning

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