



MADISON COUNTY DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

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For Immediate Release: October 17, 2018
Submitted: October 17, 2018
No. 19-18

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Protect Your Child from Lead Poisoning

If you have an infant, toddler, preschooler, or young child in your life, it's important to know how to protect that child from lead poisoning. Lead is a toxin found in our environment, and it does not belong in our blood. There is no safe level of lead exposure for children. National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, October 22-26, is a time to highlight what happens when a child is lead poisoned and how to prevent it.

First, make sure your child gets tested for lead at age one and two years old. A blood test is the only way to tell if your child has lead poisoning. This blood test must be ordered by your child's doctor. If your doctor does not have the ability to collect the blood at their office, then you will need to get the blood taken at a lab. WIC does not do lead testing.

The local Health Department is responsible for tracking children's lead test. If the test has not been done shortly after both the child's one and two-year birthday, the Madison County Health Department will send a postcard to the parent as a reminder that it is needed and how important this lead test is. You can contact the Health Department directly if you have questions about lead testing or lead poisoning prevention.

If a child's blood lead level is elevated (at 5 mcg/dL or higher), our Lead Program nurse will follow up with the parents to talk about how to bring the child's lead level down. We send educational materials to the family, and our staff is available to help with identifying sources of lead and provide recommendations for reducing the child's exposure. We also follow up to make sure that the child is re-tested at the right time.

Even if your child's lead test at one year old is within an acceptable range, your child still needs to be tested at age two. At two years old, your child is more mobile and also more likely to put their hands, toys, and other objects in their mouth, all of which could contain lead. Also, changes to where your child spends their time, such as moving to a new house or visiting family members' houses, or playing outside in the dirt, could indicate a different, possibly higher and more dangerous level. The lead blood test is only a snapshot in time, and it is very important for doctors to capture that snapshot at age one and two. Lead is a poison. Only a tiny amount of lead is needed to harm a young, growing child. While



anyone can become lead poisoned, children are especially at risk because their bodies absorb lead much more easily than adults.

Why should we be worried about lead poisoning? Too much lead in the body can cause permanent damage to the brain and nervous system. This can lead to problems with learning and paying attention, slow a child's growth and development, cause hearing and speech problems, and lead to behavior problems, such as aggressive behavior. Even low blood lead levels can affect children's behaviors, including issues with anxiety, emotion, and delayed social skills. If we find that a child has too much lead in their blood, then we will work quickly to try to bring that level down to avoid these problems that have the potential to impact the child's future.

Second, know where lead can be found indoors and out and make sure children are not getting lead on their hands, in their mouths, or breathing it in. The most common cause of lead poisoning is lead-based paint dust from older window frames, doors and trim, or walls. Lead paint was used in homes built before 1978 before we knew just how dangerous it was. A law was then passed to remove lead from household paint. Yet it still exists in older homes. When a home is repaired or renovated, lead paint can peel, chip, or flake from sanding and scraping. Opening and closing an old window can also create dust that you can't even see, which can be breathed in, causing lead poisoning. Lead dust can also settle on the child's toys or get on his hands, which he may put in his mouth.

And because most children with lead poisoning do not look or act sick, it is important to screen children who are six months to six years old for lead. Screening should be done at all check-ups, or at least annually. The screening will let you and your doctor know if your child needs to be tested for lead at times other than the necessary one and two years old. Talk to your doctor about lead screening and testing. Testing for lead helps ensure your child's health now and in the future.

For more information on protecting children from lead poisoning, visit www.healthymadisoncounty.org.

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