

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Kansas Children Still At Risk for Lead Poisoning**

*Program Encourages Parents/Caregivers to Request Blood Test*

TOPEKA — The Kansas Department of Health and Environment wants to encourage parents and caregivers to understand the risks of lead poisoning in children and when to ask for a blood test.

#### **The Health Impact**

Lead can impact IQ, behavior and development, which lasts a lifetime. Early symptoms of lead poisoning are difficult to detect, so it is advised that children be tested, rather than to wait and see if any health problems develop. Some children may show symptoms such as headache, lack of appetite, vomiting or fatigue, and disruptive behavior, but many children do not exhibit any identifiable signs of elevated lead levels at the onset. No amount of lead exposure is considered safe, particularly in children because their brains are still developing and they absorb more lead into their blood than adults.

“Testing is critical,” Dr. Lee Norman, KDHE Secretary, said. “Many people think lead problems were solved decades ago when lead in residential paint was banned, but lead is still a health hazard in Kansas. There are so many other sources of lead exposure that people may not think about. A blood test is the only way to confirm lead poisoning.”

#### **The Cost Impact**

Over the past 15 years, less than 15 percent of children were screened for blood lead each year, leaving much unknown about the true burden of blood lead poisoning in Kansas. When a child has lead exposure, the effects can lead to additional future costs to individuals and society associated with special education, decreased earning potential and criminal behavior as well as immediate costs associated with health care for treatment and remediation of an environment exposing a child to lead.

#### **The Sources**

Environmental factors contribute to lead poisoning. Some other types of lead exposure are paint in old houses, lead leaching in water pipes and lead in the soil from deteriorating exterior paint, contamination from historical use of leaded gasoline, industrial contamination, and hobbies that use lead. There are also more sources of lead poisoning that are specific to children. Any child may be at risk for lead poisoning, but the age of the home (built before 1978) and environmental factors mean that older homes and housing close to industrial sites or highways present greater risk. These types of locations disproportionately affect low income families, who also may not have the resources to change where they live or have access to fresh foods that slow or prevent the absorption of lead in the body.

### **Testing and Prevention Crucial for Children**

“The bad news is that there is no safe level of lead in the blood. The good news is that we can test for it,” Jessica Willard, Program Manager for KDHE’s Kansas Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (CLPPP) said. “If a child has an elevated blood lead level, then steps can be taken to treat and manage any health impacts.”

Parents and caregivers can help prevent lead poisoning by identifying potential lead sources and limiting exposure to them. Some immediate things that everyone can do are clean frequently and make sure that children wash their hands after playing and before eating. Even nutrition can play an important role in mitigating the absorption of lead in the blood. Foods that are high in calcium, Vitamin C and iron can help reduce lead absorption.

### **Parents Need to Know**

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment has launched a public service campaign to help parents understand the top three sources for lead poisoning and to encourage them to request a blood test for children under six who may have been exposed. The campaign includes public service announcements on television, online and social media. Parents can find more information on a special web page at [test4lead.org](http://test4lead.org). The KDHE is also enlisting the help of schools, public libraries, childcare providers, faith communities and the media to reach parents and caregivers of young children.

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