

LEAD (Pb): Talking Points

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- Lead is a heavy metal and can be toxic to humans, especially young children, affecting brain development, behaviors, sleep patterns and many other functions of the body.
- No safe blood lead level in children has been determined.
- There are often no symptoms of lead exposure to alert parents, so blood testing is the best method to detect exposure.
- Historically children in many counties in Michigan, and across the nation, have been seen with elevated levels of lead in their blood. Extensive work to eliminate lead from many environmental sources, such as leaded gasoline and lead-based paints, have resulted in dramatic declines in the number of children affected and the amount of lead in their blood.
- Between April and December 2015 in Kalamazoo County, just over 2000 young children were tested for lead in their blood. 32 of these children were found to have elevated (greater than 5 mcg/dl) blood lead levels; the majority of which (81%) were found to have blood lead levels of between 5 and 9 mcg/dl.
- Elevated blood lead levels were seen in children from 9 different zip codes.
- The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has set 5 mcg/dl as the blood lead level at which parents need to be informed and along with their pediatrician, public health officials and others can take action to reduce the child's further exposure to lead.
- Medical treatment is not usually recommended unless the blood lead level is above 44 mcg/dl.
- Lead may be found in a number of items and places around the home, including:
 - Water that comes through lead pipes or pipes with lead solder



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- Paint in homes built before 1978
 - Toys and jewelry made in countries without high lead control standards
 - Pots and cooking utensils that are brought into the US
 - Dust inhaled or contaminating clothes of people using firing ranges where lead bullets are used
 - Bare soil around the home
- Kalamazoo County discontinued its lead case management program in 2012 and home environmental lead assessments in 2014 for a number of reasons, including a lack of funding at the time, the number of children with elevated blood lead levels had dropped substantially, more private businesses offered lead abatement programs for housing stock and the state of Michigan expanded their program for environmental follow up of people identified with elevated blood lead levels.
- The few counties that operate a lead program have received specific funding for community-based, lead exposure prevention from the State.
- The situation in Flint, MI began after the source for drinking water for residents of the City of Flint was switched to the Flint River and as a result of treatment of this water to kill any pathogens. The high concentrations of chemicals used proved to be corrosive to water pipes. This led to substantial leaching of lead from old pipes which contained lead into the drinking water system. Controls should have been put into place to counter the corrosive effects to prevent leaching of lead, but were not.
- Drinking water in Kalamazoo is subject to corrosion control to prevent this type of problem.
- Municipality water supplies (such as City of Portage and City of Kalamazoo) regularly test their water for the presence of a large number of chemicals, including heavy metals such as lead. Any elevation of any of these potentially harmful chemicals would require a report to the Environmental Health program at the Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department by the municipal water authority.
- Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services Department tests well water for those people who do not have access to a municipal supply, although because of the lack of lead in the soils of the area and the use of non-lead containing well components, lead is not routinely tested in Kalamazoo



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