

Health Advisory

Update on Blood Lead Level Testing in Children in Philadelphia October 17, 2022

SUMMARY POINTS

- Lead exposure can be harmful to children, even in small amounts.
- All Philadelphia children should have their blood lead level tested at or around 12 months of age and again at or around 24 months of age, yet only about 25% of Philadelphia children have both recommended screenings.
- Healthcare providers in Philadelphia can help to end childhood lead poisoning in the City by screening all children at age 1 and again at age 2 and by counseling families about how to lower lead risk.
- The Philadelphia Department of Public Health Lead and Healthy Home Program will contact families and healthcare providers to offer home services including assistance with lead hazard remediation.

Blood Lead Level Testing

Childhood exposure to lead can have lasting negative impacts on children's health and development. There are often no obvious, immediate symptoms of lead exposure and a blood test is needed to determine if a child has been exposed to lead.

The [Childhood Lead Poisoning Surveillance Report](#) shows that the number of children with elevated lead levels in Philadelphia is improving but remains too high.

As stated in a Philadelphia Board of Health [regulation](#), the Philadelphia Department of Public Health recommends universal blood lead testing for all children as follows:

- At or around 12 months of age and again, at or around 24 months of age
- Between 24 and 72 months if the child has not been previously tested

In 2021, over 80% of Philadelphia three-year olds were tested at least once for lead; however, only 25% were tested at age one and again at age two as is recommended by the Philadelphia Department of Public Health.

Method of Testing

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health recommends testing blood lead levels via a venous sample since capillary samples have a higher false positive rate. If an elevated lead level is determined via a capillary sample, it should be confirmed with a venous sample according to the scheduled outlined by the Centers for Disease Control.

Recommended Actions for Elevated Blood Lead Levels

For venous blood lead levels > 3.5 micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g/dL}$), healthcare providers should follow recommendations from the [Centers for Disease Control](#) for management and next steps.

All elevated blood lead levels are automatically reported to the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Services – [Lead and Healthy Homes Program \(EHS-LHHP\)](#). LHHP's Program Nurse contacts the family and the medical provider regarding the results. LHHP also contact the family to schedule home visits with an Environmental Health Worker (EHW) and Environmental Health Inspector (EHI). The EHW will provide information and resources on how to keep home frees of lead dust. The EHI will conduct a full risk assessment to determine the source of lead in the home. For income-eligible families, LHHP offers lead hazard remediation. If families are not income- eligible for grant funded remediation, LHHP will work with the property owner to ensure that the lead hazards are remediated.

Healthcare Providers can consult with the Lead and Healthy Homes full-time nurse by calling (215) 685-2788.