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The PA Department of Health Adopts the New CDC Guidelines on Elevated Blood Lead Levels

The Lead Free Promise Project Applauds the State's Efforts

Harrisburg, PA (February 1, 2022) – On January 1, 2022, the Pennsylvania Department of Health adopted the new CDC blood lead reference value of 3.5 mcg/dL down from 5mcg/dL following the CDC's decision upon recommendation from the Lead Exposure and Prevention Advisory Committee (LEPAC).

This change will likely nearly double the number of children who will need intervention services and those who otherwise would not be identified by the older reference. Specifically, the state reported that 6,755 children had elevated blood lead levels in 2020 using the old reference level, but if the new reference level was applied, 12,861 children would have tested positive.

“Pennsylvania already has the 2nd largest number of children testing positive for lead poisoning among states that report to the CDC,” said Colleen McCauley, Co-Chair, Lead-Free Promise Project and Health Policy Director, Children First. “This imperative new blood lead reference level will allow for earlier intervention and opportunities for children and families to get the care and assistance they desperately need.”

The Lead-Free Promise Project, a coalition made up of more than 45 organizations that all support ending lead paint poisoning in Pennsylvania, applauds the Pennsylvania Department of Health's efforts in taking steps to combat this issue.

“Lead poisoning can cause permanent brain damage to children – especially babies and kids six and under. Lead can cause learning, behavior, hearing and speech problems, sometimes requiring special education services,” said Dr. Harriet Okatch, Ph.D, MPH, Co-Chair, Lead-Free Promise Project and Thomas Jefferson University Assistant Professor of Public Health. “And because only 20% of PA babies are tested, unfortunately, many more are likely to have high blood lead levels.”

In addition, as part of the Lead-Free Promise Project, they are asking the state to dedicate \$40 million of the American Rescue Plan dollars to start a fund to help property owners with small incomes afford to get lead-paint hazards out of homes. With expecting almost twice as many children to test positive for lead this year than last year, assistance for financially hardship homeowners will be even more critical.

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LFPP is part of ThrivingPA.com, a non-partisan, statewide campaign that seeks to improve the quality of and increase equitable access to a coordinated system of health supports, including access to comprehensive perinatal health services, children’s health insurance, nutrition supports and lead screening and abatement.