



# TOXIC LEAD

## PA LAWMAKERS MUST ACT TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN WESTMORELAND COUNTY

### DID YOU KNOW?

- 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, and is a risk factor for criminal behavior.<sup>i,ii</sup>
- For every dollar spent on removing lead paint-based hazards in children's homes and apartments, \$17-\$221 would be returned in health benefits, increased IQ, higher lifetime earnings, tax revenue, reduced spending on special education and reduced criminal activity.<sup>iii</sup>

### WHAT DOES THE LEAD POISONING CRISIS LOOK LIKE IN WESTMORELAND COUNTY?

- Westmoreland County has the **13TH HIGHEST NUMBER OF CHILDREN POISONED** of all PA counties.<sup>iv</sup>
- OVER 100 CHILDREN ARE POISONED EVERY YEAR**<sup>v</sup> - enough to fill 5 pre-school classrooms.
- With **ONLY 20% OF CHILDREN SCREENED** for lead, more are likely to be poisoned.<sup>vi</sup>
- LEAD-BASED PAINT HAZARDS IN CHILDREN'S HOMES ARE THE MAIN SOURCE OF LEAD POISONING.** Lead-based paint was not banned for residential use until 1978, and 73% of residential properties in Westmoreland County were built before 1980.<sup>vii</sup>
- Black and Hispanic children are disproportionately poisoned because they are more likely to live in older properties with deteriorated lead-based paint. In Westmoreland County, **2.5 TIMES MORE BLACK CHILDREN ARE POISONED THAN WHITE CHILDREN.**<sup>viii</sup>

## CALL TO ACTION

### CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING IS 100% PREVENTABLE

primarily by removing lead paint-based hazards in their homes. Westmoreland County babies need protection from toxic lead.

### URGE YOUR STATE LEGISLATOR TO:

- FUND REMOVAL OF LEAD PAINT FROM CHILDREN'S HOMES.**
- GUARANTEE EVERY PA CHILD IS APPROPRIATELY TESTED FOR LEAD AS PER CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL REQUIREMENTS.**

## KEVIN IS A RAMBUNCTIOUS 5-YEAR-OLD

starting kindergarten, Sarah is his 2-year-old sister, and John is the youngest of the bunch at just 1-year-old. Their mom Denise noticed that Sarah was not progressing in the same way that Kevin did when he was her age. She was slower to speak and seemed unable to pay attention when they read books together. Denise took Sarah to the doctor who recognized these symptoms as developmental delays. Because the family was covered by Medicaid, which requires blood lead testing for all children at ages one and two, Sarah and John were tested for lead and Kevin got a follow-up test as well. All three kids had elevated blood lead levels, and Sarah's was especially high at 19 ug/dL, nearly four times higher than the CDC's threshold for poisoning. Her pediatrician contacted her Medicaid health plan to send a lead inspection team to test the family's home, which Denise described as more than 50 years old and in significant disrepair with holes in the roof and peeling paint inside and out. There are no medications to cure Denise's children and reverse any damage done. The number one 'treatment' for Sarah and her siblings is to stop being exposed to lead hazards and remove the toxic lead from their home.

*The Lead-Free Promise Project is part of Thriving PA - <https://thrivingpa.org/>*



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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control, (2020). <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/prevention/health-effects.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Wright JP, Dietrich KN, Ris MD, Hornung RW, Wessel SD, Lanphear BP, et al. (2008). Association of Prenatal and Childhood Blood Lead Concentrations with Criminal Arrests in Early Adulthood. *PLoS Med* 5(5): e101. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0050101. <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article/file?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.0050101&type=printable>

<sup>3</sup> Gould, E. (2009). Childhood Lead Poisoning: Conservative Estimates of the Social and Economic Benefits of Lead Hazard Control. *Environ. Health Perspect.* 117(7): 1162-1167. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2717145/>

<sup>4</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Public Health, (2022). 2020 Childhood Lead Surveillance Annual Report. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Environmental%20Health/2020%20Childhood%20Lead%20Surveillance%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Public Health, (2022). 2020 Childhood Lead Surveillance Annual Report. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Environmental%20Health/2020%20Childhood%20Lead%20Surveillance%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Public Health, (2022). 2020 Childhood Lead Surveillance Annual Report. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Environmental%20Health/2020%20Childhood%20Lead%20Surveillance%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> S. Frostenson. (February 3, 2016). 18 cities in Pennsylvania reported higher levels of lead exposure than Flint. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/2016/2/3/10904120/lead-exposure-flint-pennsylvania>

<sup>8</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Public Health, (2022). 2020 Childhood Lead Surveillance Annual Report. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Environmental%20Health/2020%20Childhood%20Lead%20Surveillance%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> US Census.

<sup>10</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Public Health, (2022). 2020 Childhood Lead Surveillance Annual Report. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Environmental%20Health/2020%20Childhood%20Lead%20Surveillance%20Annual%20Report.pdf>