

Meigs Health Matters: Lead Poisoning is a Serious Environmental Health Threat

Lead Poisoning is a serious environmental public health threat to children in Ohio. Lead is a dangerous, toxic substance that is naturally found in the Earth's crust, but it can also be a component of many products. Its past overuse in paint, leaded gasoline, and other products has resulted in additional contamination and human illness in many parts of the world. Lead can enter the body through the skin, by breathing, or by swallowing contaminated products, such as food, water, paint and dust. Lead poisoning is not limited to children, but can affect anyone.

There is no safe level of lead in the human body. High lead levels can cause serious neurological and developmental issues in children, some of the most common signs being learning difficulties, irritability, loss of appetite, weight loss, sluggishness, fatigue, abdominal pain and vomiting. Lead poisoning affects every organ in the body and can happen rapidly depending upon the source of exposure. Homes built before 1970 are most likely to be at risk for having lead-based paint on the walls or trim. If you live in a home built before 1978, please consider having it tested for lead. Lead may also be found in the soil around the home, sometimes as a result of things like paint chips, but also due to leaded gasoline spills or copper pipes that have been soldered with lead. Some pottery and cosmetics even contain lead. Because children tend to play on the floor and on the ground and tend to put their fingers in their mouths, they are at the highest risk of lead poisoning.

Preventing lead poisoning can be accomplished through simple measures. After playing outside, have children wash their hands with soap under warm, running water. Do not allow children to go barefoot outside; if they do, wash their feet immediately upon coming inside. Do not allow children to put their mouths on window sills, commonly done at the toddler age. Parents, if your job involves you working with lead, such as ammunition, please change your clothes before touching or holding your child. These are just a few examples to reduce lead poisoning.

Ohio has a program called Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (HHLPP), which is operated through the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and locally through the Meigs County Health Department. Every child should have his or her lead tested by age one. If a child has Medicaid, Ohio Law requires them to be tested at both age one and two due to higher risk. All children should also have their lead checked at age 5. This can be done by the pediatrician or at the Meigs County Health Department by a finger poke, for children up to age 5 by appointment. The cost is \$20 for those without Medicaid and also includes a screening of the child's hemoglobin level. If the finger-poke test comes back 3.5 Ug/dl or higher, then the child must receive a confirmatory test by venous blood draw. If a child is under age six and has a blood lead level of 10+, I am notified and am responsible for case management of those children until they turn six years of age. Meigs County currently has between 10 and 20 children who have been diagnosed with elevated lead levels, so this is not an uncommon problem. In fact, all children aged less than six years who live within zip codes 45769 and 45760 are at

higher risk for lead poisoning according to ODH, which is likely due to the age of homes in the area. ODH offers a webpage that shows specific residences within Meigs County that have been identified as having lead contamination, which can be found at

<https://data.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/data/view/lead-hazardous-properties-2nd-order>.

The Meigs County Health Department has educational resources available for the public by calling 740-992-6626. Information is also available through ODH at <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/childhood-lead-poisoning/welcome-to>.



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