

Governor's Children's Cabinet makes lead poison prevention a priority

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October 23-30, 2016 is National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Bruce Rauner's Cabinet on Children and Youth recently announced a statewide, cross-agency initiative to reduce children's exposure to lead. Lead poisoning is one of the most prevalent, preventable, environmental health hazards and is known to contribute to learning disabilities, developmental delays, and violent behavior.

“There is no safe level of lead in the body. Children exposed to high lead levels tend to suffer from life-long complications that affect their ability to think, learn, or behave,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.

D. “Reducing blood lead levels among all Illinois children six years of age or younger would reduce crime and increase on-time high school graduation rates later in life.”

Compared to other states, Illinois remains among the highest for percentage of children with elevated blood lead levels. Out of approximately 270,000 Illinois children tested in 2014, more than 18,000 had blood lead levels at the federal public health intervention level.

As one focus of the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet, lead exposure has an impact on all of the other Cabinet subgroups. Reducing lead exposure and decreasing the level at which children are eligible for public health services would have a positive impact on educational achievement. There are opportunities to connect home visiting programs and other social service initiatives with expanded lead-related activities, creating more robust services and a more integrated social service delivery system.

Deteriorating lead-based paint remains the primary source of lead exposure to children. Approximately 66 percent of Illinois housing units were built prior to the residential lead paint ban of 1978.

Lead exposure can be significantly reduced by taking simple precautions around the house. These include the following:

- Cleaning up paint chips and peeling paint by washing
- Washing floors, counter tops, and window sills weekly with an all-purpose detergent or a detergent specifically formulated to remove lead dust
- Using proper safety measures when renovating or remodeling your house, like not using electric sanders or open flame torches to remove paint or wallpaper
- Assuring that children and pregnant women do not enter a work area until renovations are complete and the area has been thoroughly cleaned
- Washing a child’s hands, mouth and face, and toys often
- Allowing the cold water to run for several minutes in the morning before using it for drinking, cooking, or mixing infant formula in case lead pipes or solder is present

- Removing shoes when coming indoors so lead from dust or soil is not tracked inside
- Eating a well-balanced, low-fat diet that is high in calcium and iron, which can help reduce lead absorption

The primary goals of the Illinois Lead Program include lead poisoning prevention through community education and public awareness campaigns, identifying lead-poisoned children, and providing prompt interventions to reduce blood lead levels and improve health and developmental outcomes.

For more information about lead poisoning prevention, visit the IDPH [website](http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/environmental-health-protection/lead-poisoning-prevention) at <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/environmental-health-protection/lead-poisoning-prevention>