

News



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 6, 2009

Connecticut Department of Public Health

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Mandatory Universal Blood Lead Screening Begins in Connecticut

Hartford – The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced a new state requirement for universal blood lead screening of Connecticut children. The new legislation, which went into effect on January 1, 2009, requires all primary care providers to perform annual blood lead screening of all children less than three years of age and screen any child between the ages of 36 and 72 months who has not been previously screened.

On June 26, 2007, Governor Rell signed Public Act 07-2 requiring mandatory universal blood lead screening of children. “Lead poisoning is a completely preventable disease and the impairment that it may cause is irreversible,” stated Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. J. Robert Galvin. “Lead poisoning is frequently unrecognized because it often occurs with no obvious symptoms. A blood lead test is the only way to know whether a person has been poisoned with lead. This new legislation will ensure that lead is taken out the environment of children who are exposed.”

According to state health officials, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention projects that every year over 230,000 children across the United States are poisoned by lead. In 2007, 1,020 Connecticut children under the age of six were found to have elevated blood lead levels.

“Lead poisoning is a very serious issue,” added Dr. Galvin. “Lead harms children's nervous systems and is associated with reduced intelligence, behavioral problems, and learning disabilities. In large doses, it can cause coma, convulsions and death.”

Under the new law, local health departments will respond at a lower blood lead level than is currently required. Local health departments currently conduct epidemiological investigations and lead inspections to identify sources of lead exposure for children with confirmed blood lead levels that are greater than or equal to 20 micrograms per deciliter. The new law requires that local health departments also conduct lead inspections to identify sources of lead exposure for children with confirmed blood lead levels that are greater than or equal to 15 micrograms per deciliter but less than 20 micrograms per deciliter in two tests taken three or more months apart. The local director of health will order abatement or remediation of any sources of lead exposure that are identified. State funding will be distributed to local health departments to support these additional activities.

DPH has provided education and outreach since the new law was passed in 2007 to ensure that parents, property owners, local health officials, health care providers, private sector lead consultants, lead abatement practitioners, and others are aware of the new law. Additional resources that include upgrading of DPH laboratory equipment and increased staffing have been instituted, and DPH will provide oversight, consultation, and support services. DPH will also closely monitor through on-going surveillance of blood lead screening rates, blood lead testing results, practitioner compliance, and local health department response activity to assure successful implementation of the law.

Additionally, DPH plans to partner with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and students from the Harvard University School of Public Health to develop a procedure that will be used to evaluate implementation of the mandatory screening requirements.

There are many ways that children can be exposed to lead but lead paint (which is found in homes built before 1978) continues to be the most common source of lead exposure. Paint deteriorates (e.g., chips, flakes, peels) when it is not properly maintained and lead paint chips and dust are the result. Also, lead paint may be disturbed during painting and renovation projects in older homes. If safe work procedures are not used lead paint chips and dust will be created which will settle on toys, windowsills, and floors.

Dr. Galvin added that “Parents can help to protect their children from lead poisoning by taking preventive measures in their homes and making sure that they do not purchase or own recalled toys or products containing lead.”

The Connecticut Department of Public Health is the state’s leader in public health policy and advocacy with a mission to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of our state. To contact the department, please visit its website at www.ct.gov/dph or call (860) 509-7270.

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