

Special Bulletin

For professional providers

October 14, 2024

Lead Poisoning Prevention: A Call to Action in Pennsylvania

National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week (October 20-26, 2024) highlights the ongoing threat of lead exposure, especially for children.

Lead can be found in homes, daycare centers, schools, and even food packaging, causing serious health problems, such as developmental delays, learning difficulties, and hearing issues.

Pennsylvania faces a critical situation: It ranks second in the nation for both the number of children with elevated blood lead levels (EBLL) and for under-testing. In 2021, nearly 5,000 children under 6 years old had confirmed EBLL.

Highmark Healthy Kids (CHIP) requires lead blood testing for all members between 9 months and 2 years old. Testing is also required at 12 and 24 months for Medicaid-covered children.

Recommendations for Providers

Practitioners are urged to:

- Talk to parents about lead poisoning and the importance of testing.
- Perform lead blood testing at every office visit, including sick visits.
- Utilize in-office testing, if available, for convenience and continuity of care.
 - Use CPT code 83655 for lead screening laboratory-chemistry test (capillary specimen or venous blood).
- Report all blood lead test results to the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

The department's Lead Surveillance Program tracks and monitors childhood lead activity through the Pennsylvania National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (PA-NEDSS), a web-based application system that receives all lead reports on Pennsylvania's children.

Through PA-NEDSS, the Division of Child and Adult Health Services can identify possible high-risk areas, locate areas of under-testing and identify other potential service gaps.

Resources

- **Lead Care II Point of Care Testing Machine** – Last year, Highmark provided 22 testing machines to Pennsylvania providers at no cost. *There is one machine still available from the 2023 initiative.* If interested in adding this machine to your practice, send an email to: Emalee.ranalli@highmark.com.
- **Highmark Healthy Kids:** Offers a \$15 Walmart gift card for members 0-2 years old who receive lead blood testing in 2024.
- **PA Lead Information Line (800-440-LEAD):** Provides information on lead prevention, exposure, inspection, and removal resources.

Lead poisoning is preventable. By taking action, we can protect our children and ensure a healthier future.

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