



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Prevent Childhood Lead Poisoning

October 24-30 is National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week

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BURLINGTON – On those rare occasions when parents tell pediatrician Lou DiNicola, MD, that their child does not need to be screened for lead poisoning, he will continue to encourage them to do the test.

“What I tell them is, there is no environment where there is no risk,” said Dr. DiNicola, of Gifford Medical Center in Randolph.

Even in a new home with a brand new water system, he says, there can be possible exposures to lead poisoning. At his practice, nearly every 1- and 2-year old child is tested. The Health Department also recommends testing all children ages 36 to 72 months who have not previously been tested.

“I had one case where the parents lived in a brand new house with a new water system and the child had a high lead level, and we had to look for the source of exposure,” said Dr. DiNicola. “We figured out that they had bought a chair at a lawn sale that was newly painted but had old layers of paint, and the child was teething on it out on the front porch. I effectively get zero resistance to testing after we talk about the hazards of lead.”

New homes tied into old water systems can also have high lead levels, Dr. DiNicola said. Lead can cause serious health problems for infants, including developmental issues and lower IQ. Children can get lead poisoning in their own home, apartment or day care. Lead is most common in older buildings (in paint, dust, drinking water and in the dirt outside). Lead exposure can also come from work or hobbies, like auto body work, painting or scraping paint, making stained glass or casting lead toys, sinkers or shots.

In 2009, 83 percent of the state’s 1-year-old children, and 61 percent of 2-year-old children were screened for lead poisoning in Vermont. The Health Department is committed to universal screening and testing. If fewer than 85 percent of 1-year-olds and fewer than 75 percent of 2-years-olds have been screened in Vermont by January 1, 2011, the secretary of the Agency of Human Services will require a rule that health care providers ensure the screening.

“Lead poisoning is preventable. With the efforts of health care providers such as Dr. DiNicola – and expanded outreach and education, we consistently have removed barriers to screening every young child in Vermont,” said Health Commissioner Wendy Davis, MD.

Vermont was the first state in the nation to lower the elevated blood lead level of concern from 10 to 5ug/dL (micrograms per deciliter). A simple finger prick blood test is all that is needed to screen for lead poisoning.

“At every 1-and 2-year-old well child visit we test for lead, my other partners know it’s important and the nurses know it,” Dr. DiNicola said. “It is very rare that a kid slips through. This should be the standard.”

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