



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Health Department Urges Testing for Childhood Lead Poisoning



News Release: October 25, 2013

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BURLINGTON – One-year-old Emmett did not flinch or cry when his nurse pricked a big toe to take a small sample of blood to test for the presence of lead. The Health Department recommends the routine blood lead screening test for all children at age 1 and again at age 2.

You can watch a short video of Emmett's bravery at: http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/lead/lead_parents.aspx

"Lead is a leading environmental health threat for children," said Lori Cragin, who is the Health Department's director of environmental health and Emmett's mom. "We're working with the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians to improve blood lead screening rates, and our 12 district offices are also working hard to encourage parents to make sure their children get screened."



Lead testing rates for 1-year-old children increased from 80 percent in 2006, to 81 percent in 2012, and from 44 percent to 68 percent for 2-year-olds. While the rates have improved, they still fall well short of the goal of 100 percent.

Approximately 300 children in the state are identified each year as having too-high levels of lead in their blood. Early detection and intervention, including preventing further exposure to the source of the poisoning, is vital to preventing children life-long health effects, such as lowering a child's IQ.

When a child has a capillary blood level between 5 to 9 micrograms per deciliter, the Health Department sends educational materials, and an offer for a free lead dust wipe kit to test for lead sources in the home. When the level is 10 micrograms per deciliter and above, a Health Department case manager will test the home and work with the family to reduce further exposure.

Lead-based paint and lead contaminated dust are the main sources of poisoning. Vermont has one of the oldest housing stocks in the nation. All homes built before 1978 are likely to contain some lead-based paint. Children can also be exposed to lead from jewelry, key chains, zippers or other things that they touch or put into their mouths.

There is no safe level of lead in the body. Young children are at highest risk for lead poisoning because their developing bodies absorb lead more easily. Lead is an invisible threat, and it is common for children with unsafe blood-lead levels to show no obvious symptoms.

For more information and guidelines for blood lead screening for health care providers visit healthvermont.gov.

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