



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Health Department Receives \$300,000 Grant to Increase Lead Activities

PITTSBURGH – The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) today announced that it has received a grant from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation, in the amount of \$300,000, to support the expansion of the department's lead activities.

"We are very excited to announce this support from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation. It will allow ACHD to offer blood lead testing for children who do not have insurance and it will also support the expansion of educational materials for providers and families," said Director Dr. Karen Hacker. "We are committed to preventing lead exposure from all sources and this grant is critical to enhancing our efforts."

The Health Department has taken multiple steps towards a comprehensive approach to lead poisoning. The generous grant will provide the support needed to inform, prevent, screen and monitor this challenging health risk. The grant activities include: 1) examining and updating the current housing-based lead program and associated policies to ensure it is following the best evidence-based practices for lead poisoning prevention, surveillance and intervention; 2) expanding lead investigation capacity by purchasing an additional x-ray fluorescence machine; 3) meeting all infrastructure needs to implement and conduct blood lead testing at 3 – 5 ACHD clinical facilities; and, 4) developing and providing targeted, plain-language educational materials to support clinicians, families and landlords.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), today there are at least 4 million households where children are being exposed to high levels of lead. The CDC has indicated that no safe blood lead level in children has been identified. At high levels of exposure, lead toxicity can cause symptoms including coma, seizures and even death given its effect on the brain and central nervous system. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, academic achievement, and criminal behavior.

Lead exists in multiple sources in Allegheny County including paint, soil, water due to lead pipes and solder, jewelry and toys. Young children between one and two years of age are especially at risk for lead exposure since they are newly mobile and tend to put things in their mouths. Recently, the Allegheny County Health Department passed a universal lead testing regulation that is awaiting County Council and Executive approval. This new grant will support efforts at ACHD to ensure that all children have access to testing and families have access to information on risks, prevention and interventions.

For more information on lead and what you can do right now to protect your family against lead exposure contact the Health Department's Housing & Community Environment Program at 412-350-4046 or www.achd.net/housing/.

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