

Lead Freedom Report: Where We Go from Here

Report Summary

The Community Report on Lead Poisoning begins with a very important dedication: **“To all the children of Syracuse: We see you, we hear you, and we love you.”** Although Syracuse is located in prosperous Onondaga County, Syracuse families suffer from high levels of childhood lead poisoning. At the first-ever “People’s Public Hearing on Lead Poisoning,” held on June 12, 2021, experts called for action from every parent, concerned citizen, and leader in this County.

WHY WE CARE

Home should be a safe place for all, and every child should have a fair chance at life. Lead poisoning, caused primarily from the deterioration of old paint, causes brain damage and stunts the potential of our children. We should use our resources to protect the brains of our children, whose well-being will be our well-being in the near future. Time is of the essence – the time to act is today.

THE PROBLEM

Lead poisoning is entirely preventable, but it continues as the result of a system that values the short-term profits of landlords and property sellers over the long-term well-being of our families. The responses of our institutions and their leaders, while important, are insufficient. We call for greater imagination and leadership to solve this problem.

SOLUTIONS

- Use and enforce the Syracuse Lead Abatement & Control Ordinance.
- Put a link to the Lead Ordinance on the City of Syracuse’s website.
- Make the Rental Registry information easy for anyone to access online
- Train, certify, and hire people affected by lead poisoning as lead inspectors.
- Create more avenues for lead testing. If we monitor the health of our children, then we can put resources where they can best protect our families.
- Give us clear “race and place” data. Because of disparities by race, enforce the Syracuse Lead Ordinance through an intentional, racial justice lens.
- Put many more resources into education, outreach, and communication strategies. Bring public health knowledge and skills to the community.

ACTION & HUMAN RIGHTS

We are demanding a fully sufficient response from our elected and institutional leaders to address this crisis. **This emergency in our community demands the same kind of attention as a five-alarm fire. The time for greater commitment is now.**

Ending childhood lead poisoning in Syracuse is a matter of human rights. All human beings are born free and equal. Human dignity is revolted whenever we let members of our human family suffer unnecessarily.

Syracuse has a grand history of human rights. Now is the time to apply the lessons of history to the struggle for our children’s health and future.

Neuropsychological Effects of Lead Poisoning

Lead is a neurotoxic substance that has been shown in numerous research studies to affect brain function and development. Children who have been exposed to elevated levels of lead (>5 ug/dl) are at increased risk for cognitive and behavioral problems during development (CDC, 2012).

Factors which contribute to the risk include:

- intensity of exposure (highest lead level)
- chronicity or duration of exposure
- age of the child during exposure
- nutritional and biological status of the child
- degree of environmental/ developmental stimulation



The kinds of neuropsychological problems resulting from lead poisoning can vary with the nature of the exposure history (intensity, chronicity, age at exposure, etc.) combined with the other contributing risk factors (nutrition, environmental stimulation).

The outcome of these neuropsychological deficits for the child is often quite debilitating and include poor academic learning and performance as well as problems with the development of appropriate social relationships. It is important to understand the child's neuropsychological strengths and deficits in order to reduce the risks of lead poisoning by planning for appropriate developmental, family, educational, and behavioral treatment interventions.

Checklist of Possible Neuropsychological Problems Associated with Lead

- Delayed language or motor milestones (infant, toddler)
- Poor speech articulation
- Poor language understanding or usage
- Problems maintaining attention in school or home
- High activity level (hyperactivity)
- Problems with learning and remembering new information
- Rigid, inflexible problem-solving abilities
- Delayed general intellectual abilities
- Learning problems in school (reading, language, math, writing)
- Problems controlling behavior (e.g., aggressive, impulsive)
- Problems with fine or gross motor coordination

What Can Be Done?

Prevention:

- Lead-safe housing
- Education of public, medical, and educational communities

Intervention:

- Universal early identification
- Lead-safe housing
- Aggressive early medical treatment
- Aggressive early behavioral treatment
- Rehabilitation and special education services
- Adequate nutrition

Source: Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital, Baltimore, MD; <https://www.mwph.org/programs/lead-treatment/effects>; accessed: 12/15/2018