

The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is issuing this health advisory to remind health care providers to test babies and toddlers for lead exposure at or around 12 months of age and again at 24 months.

## **Summary**

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, far fewer babies and toddlers are being tested for lead exposure. A recent review of Delaware childhood blood lead testing data shows a significant decrease in childhood lead screenings in 2020 due to the pandemic. Lead testing rates dropped by an average of 54% in the first six months of 2020, compared to 2019. During the first six months of 2021, childhood lead testing rates in Delaware dropped by an average of 63%, compared to 2019.

## **Background**

Children younger than age 6, including unborn babies, are most susceptible to lead poisoning because their brains and central nervous systems are still developing. Childhood lead poisoning permanently damages the brain, leading to learning disabilities and other health problems.

## **Recommendations**

The Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at DPH encourages physicians to order a blood lead-level test for children for these reasons:

- Children and families are spending more time in their homes during the pandemic, increasing their risk of lead exposure from paint and dust, the primary sources of lead poisoning.
- Many families and property owners in older homes are also using this time to initiate Do-It-Yourself home projects or renovations, further increasing the risk of lead exposure.

## **Additional Information/Resources**

- CDC Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/default.htm>.
- Contact the DPH Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at 302-744-4546, ext. 5, or visit <https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsp/lead.html>.