

Making New Jersey Lead Safe for Children – It’s more than water

Earlier this month, we were gratified to see Governor Murphy and the NJ Legislature take significant steps to further statewide efforts to eliminate lead from water lines and homes over the next ten years. A package of bills to protect the health of New Jersey children from lead poisoning is groundbreaking and sets the standard for good policy addressing a complex issue. **It’s a good start, but more action is needed to finish the job of making New Jersey homes and apartments safe from lead paint.**

Lead based Paint Causes 80% of Childhood Lead Poisoning

It’s not lead in water, but lead in the *paint of NJ homes and apartments* that causes the vast majority (70%-80%) of the more than 4,800 NEW childhood lead poisoning cases *each year*. As the lead paint deteriorates, lead *dust* spreads to floors, toys, counters, and window ledges, eventually making it to the mouths, lungs and brains of vulnerable children. Lead is a dangerous neurotoxin that affects a child’s learning, memory, and even behavior, as it damages the part of the brain that controls impulse. Children with even low levels of lead are six times more likely to enter the juvenile justice system, 30% more likely to fail 3rd grade reading and math and seven times more likely to drop out of school.¹ Tragically, in 2015, 13 municipalities in New Jersey had a higher percentage of children with elevated blood lead levels than Flint, MI.²

The Costs of Lead Poisoning to New Jersey

Housing experts tell us to assume 68% of NJ residences -- the percentage built before lead paint was banned in 1978 -- are contaminated with lead. This means that there are 2,150,452 occupied housing units in New Jersey that contain possible lead-based paint hazards. Of these housing units, approximately 257,854 occupied units contain both children under six and possible lead hazards.³

Prevention is far less costly than treatment, when it comes to lead poisoning -- both financially and morally. Let’s be clear, today we are using our children as lead detectors, only intervening to make their home lead safe **after** they have already suffered the *irreversible effects* of lead poisoning. Conversely, testing a home for lead and remediating those hazards *before a child is poisoned* costs a fraction of what each lead poisoned child costs the taxpayers of NJ.

It is estimated that *each child* with lead poisoning costs NJ taxpayers a minimum of \$32,000 in costs related to special education, healthcare, criminal justice, etc. Each year NJ taxpayers *shoulder a minimum of \$61 million in costs related to lead poisoning*. Estimates are that those **annual costs** are as high as \$1.2 billion when all costs are taken into account.³

However, researchers claim that anywhere between \$17 and \$50 could be **saved in taxes** for each \$1 spent on lead safe repairs.⁴ The NJ Department of the Public Advocate estimated future savings from avoiding lead exposures to be \$27 billion statewide.⁵

¹ https://economics.yale.edu/sites/default/files/aizer_feb_12_2015.pdf

² https://www.nj.com/news/2016/02/11_cities_in_jersey_have_more_lead-affected_kids_t.html

³ https://www.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/clinics/health-advocacy/new_jersey_cba.pdf

⁴ Gould, Elise. “Childhood lead poisoning: conservative estimates of the social and economic benefits of lead hazard control.” *Environmental health perspectives* vol. 117,7 (2009): 1162-7.

⁵ <https://www.hcdnnj.org/lead>

Becoming a Leader on Making Homes Lead Safe for Children

One of the reasons that children continue to be poisoned by lead based paint, is that there is no statewide law that assesses the vast majority of our housing for lead. Currently, one- and two-family homes and apartments are not being inspected for lead at any time, nor are home sellers required to notify buyers of the lead status of their home.

Two critical bills in the NJ Legislature -- Assembly 1877 and Senate 1212¹ -- address these gaping loopholes in our policy to ensure that a family's home or apartment is safe from lead.

These bills require a proactive inspection process for rental properties, so that families can be sure their home is lead-safe before they move in and requires that landlords have an updated Lead Safe Certificate at rental turnover. A second key component ensures that at point of sale, homebuyers know if there are lead hazards in the home (like they do for radon) by requiring a home inspection to include a lead assessment and disclosure to the seller. This closes a dangerous loophole that currently allows the seller to say "I don't know" to the question of the existence of lead-based paint in the house.

In states and cities where these types of policies have been implemented, childhood lead poisoning from lead-based paint has plummeted. In Rochester, for example, after requiring a lead safe certificate for all rental housing, lead poisoning of children dropped nearly 90% over 10 years. Maryland has reduced lead poisoning in Baltimore by 99%; Rhode Island and Massachusetts have had similar outcomes.⁶ The implementation of A-1877 and S-1212 will mean that every family will have the knowledge they need to keep children safe from lead in their rental apartments or newly purchased home.

What You Can Do to Protect Children from Lead

While there is a broad consensus that lead is a big concern, often the legislative process needs a push in the final stages to have good legislation enacted. That push needs to come from concerned citizens, parents, community organizations, the media and other stakeholders. That's where you come in.

If you believe that all children in New Jersey should grow up in lead safe homes then we ask that you:

- 1) Have your Agency or Organization become a signer to the attached letter. That letter will be distributed to key members of the legislature.
- 2) Share this letter with Agencies or Organizations with whom you partner and ask them to become a co-signer too.
- 3) Ask your local paper to write an editorial in support of these bills, or submit an Op-Ed on behalf of your organization.

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¹ *Bill Sponsors and Co-Sponsors: Assembly Bill 1877: Holley (D-20), Wimberly (D-35), Benson (D-14), Mukherji (D-33), Reynolds-Jackson (D-15), Speight (D-29), Chiaravalloti (D-31). Senate Bill -1212: Ruiz (D-29), Cruz-Perez (D-5), Turner (D-15)*

⁶ https://betterbuildingsinitiative.energy.gov/sites/default/files/Advancing_%20Affordable_Energy_Investment.pdf