



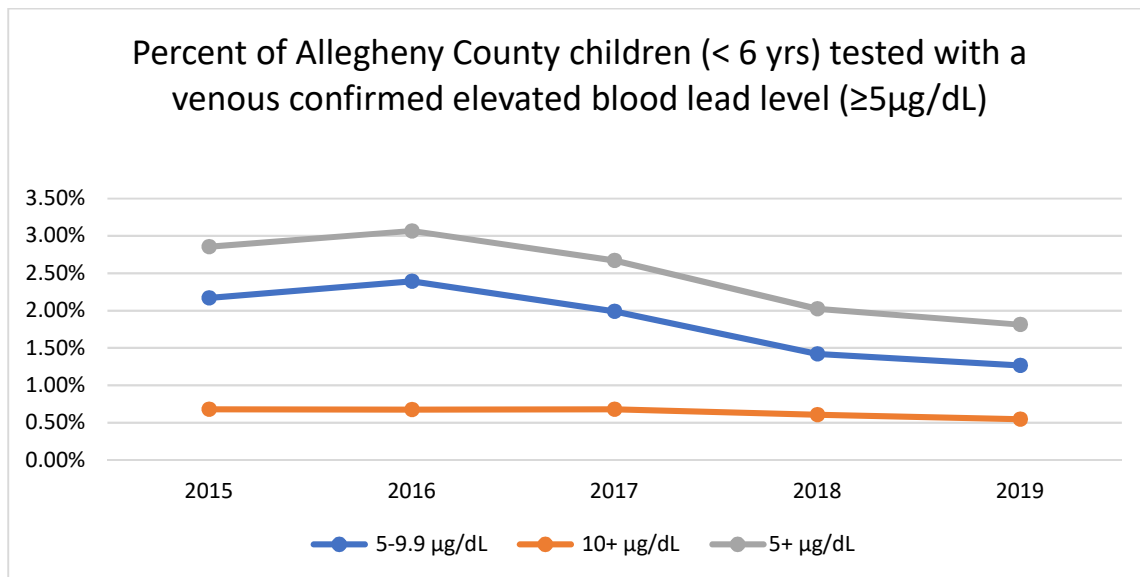
Lead in Allegheny County

Lead is a toxic metal that has been found in fuel, paints, glazes, and pipes. Even though lead was removed from many of these sources, lead persists throughout the environment. For example, old lead-based paint (although banned in 1978) can chip and peel and produce lead contaminated paint chips and dust. Lead from water service lines can get into water. Lead from gasoline, although limited in 1974 and banned in the US since 1996, is still found in soil along highly traveled roadways.

Get the facts

Lead is not naturally found in the body and can cause damage to adults and children. Lead in adults can contribute to high blood pressure and kidney damage. Lead in children causes damage to the brain resulting in delays in development, decreased IQ, and problems with behavior. The CDC considers a blood lead level of five micrograms per deciliter (5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$) or higher as elevated, but there is no safe level of lead for children.

In Allegheny County, about 440 children each year are found to have an elevated lead level. More information on the number of children with elevated lead in Allegheny County can be found [here](#).



The main cause of elevated lead levels in the county is lead-based paint found in older homes. Lead-based paint was banned from use in consumer paint in 1978, but many homes built before the ban still contain the paint. When lead-based paint gets old, it produces small paint chips and dust which put children at risk as they crawl and put their hands into their mouth while they explore their surroundings. Across Allegheny County, 81% of the structures were built before 1980.

In 2019, ACHD conducted 135 home studies to help identify the source of lead for children who had elevated lead levels. Most of these studies (117 of 135, 87%) had old lead paint, 88 (65%) had dust with an elevated lead level, 95 (70%) had elevated lead levels in the soil. Very few, only about 2%, had an elevated water lead level.

Get your child tested

In 2018, Allegheny County council passed Article XXIII. This new regulation requires that all children living in Allegheny County be tested for blood lead twice – once between the age at 9 to 12 months and once at 24 months. It also requires any child under 6 years who was not tested for lead do so as soon as possible. If not offered, parents should request testing from their pediatric health care provider. If your child's health care provider does not offer testing, the Health Department offers testing at its immunization clinic.

In many doctor's offices and the Health Department, the first test for lead is a usually a capillary or 'finger-stick' test. If the initial test returns with a level of 5 µg/dL or higher, the doctor should order a blood test from the vein, known as a venous blood lead test. The "finger-stick" test can sometimes return a falsely elevated level. It is important to have the follow-up test if the capillary is elevated to determine the true lead level of the child.

If the follow-up test is also elevated, the Health Department is notified by the laboratory and staff from the Housing program will reach out to the family. The Housing program staff will offer education, referral to [early intervention services](#), and a free home lead study. The home lead study will help find the source of the child's lead level. After the lead is found, staff will work with the home owner or tenant and landlord to find the best way to prevent more lead risk.

Get your child tested today! More information from the Health Department on testing can be found [here](#).

Get your home tested, prevent the problem

After a child has a confirmed venous blood lead test result of 5 µg/dL or higher, [ACHD Housing](#) staff will reach out to the family and offer a free home lead study to find the source of lead. During the study, the trained staff will test soil, paint, dust, water, and other possible sources for lead.

When it comes to lead, prevention is key. If you are currently pregnant or thinking about starting a family, now is the time to get your home tested. If your home does have lead hazards, certain changes and repairs to the home can help ensure the health of any child that enters the home, now or in the future. The [Allegheny Lead Safe Home Program](#) offers resources and financial help to some families based on need in Allegheny County.

Additional Lead Resources:

- [Department of Housing and Urban Development: Healthy Homes for Health Families](#)
- [Environmental Protection Agency: Learn about Lead](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Lead Poisoning Prevention](#)
- [Women for a Healthy Environment](#)
- [Get the Lead Out, Pittsburgh](#)

References:

World Health Organization. Preventing Disease Through Healthy Environments, Exposure to Lead: A Major Public Health Concern.2019. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/329953/WHO-CED-PHE-EPE-19.4.7-eng.pdf?ua=1>