

Lead-Safe Texas

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Blood Lead Surveillance Branch

Texas Department of State Health Services
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With the support of communities throughout Texas, regional public health offices, and Texas healthcare workers, BLSB is working diligently toward a safer, healthier Texas.

About this Newsletter

This newsletter provides information on lead poisoning prevention. You will find all newsletters on our website at dshs.texas.gov/lead.

About the Blood Lead Surveillance Branch

The Texas Department of State Health Services Blood Lead Surveillance Branch (BLSB) maintains a surveillance system of blood lead test results for children and adults. Our goal is to eliminate lead poisoning as a public health problem in Texas. We do this by working with health, housing, and environmental organizations. With the support of communities, regional public health offices, and Texas healthcare workers, BLSB is working diligently toward a safer, healthier Texas.

What is Lead?

Lead is a highly toxic metal. In the past, lead caused extensive environmental contamination and health problems in many parts of the world. In 1978, the federal government banned the sale of lead-containing paint for consumer use to reduce the amount of lead in the environment.

If a home was built before 1978, there may be a chance it contains lead-based paint. Lead can also be in soil, drinking water, amulets, pottery, cosmetics, and even toys.

Incorporating Lead Education as part of Anticipatory Guidance

Getting through all the items at a child's well visit is important. We know it can be difficult for all parties. It can be hard for the provider, parent, and even the child. But while you're covering all the health topics, don't forget to screen for the child's physical environment.

The physical environment can help uncover sources of lead exposure. Children spend many hours at their home, the homes of relatives and friends, and even at daycare. It's important to share anticipatory guidance about their environment. This is so that parents are better aware of what their child is exposed to. In addition, your clinic can provide the best service to the child.

But how can you incorporate lead education in such a short well visit? The best part is that you don't need to do much to pass on these lessons!

- Screening.** There are existing screening questionnaires you can use to determine lead hazards. Using these screening tools can help you get an idea of what to focus on in your discussion with the parent. BLSB provides a questionnaire in English, Spanish, Arabic, French, and Burmese. You can find it [here](#).
- Rapport.** Getting to know your patient's life outside the examination room can benefit their care. Speaking to parents (and patients, if they're old enough) can give you a glimpse of their environmental exposures. It can help to determine if they're at risk for lead exposure.
- Prevention.** Preventing lead absorption is tied to healthy eating habits and having a clean, safe home. Proper nutrition prevents the absorption of lead into the body. Consistent cleaning and removal of dust in the home can prevent the amount of lead a child is exposed to.
- Testing.** Testing can be done by a capillary or venous test. It's important to stress to parents that the test is the only way to know if there is lead. It's an additional test at the visit.
- Retesting.** If a child needs to come back in for a retest, it's important to stress to the parent the health benefits for the child.

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Resources for Providers

[CDC's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program](#)

[Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units \(PEHSUs\)](#)

[Healthy Environment, Healthy Child Toolkit](#)

[Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry \(ATSDR\)](#)

Trend of Testing Rates & Number of Children Tested in Texas, 2013-2019

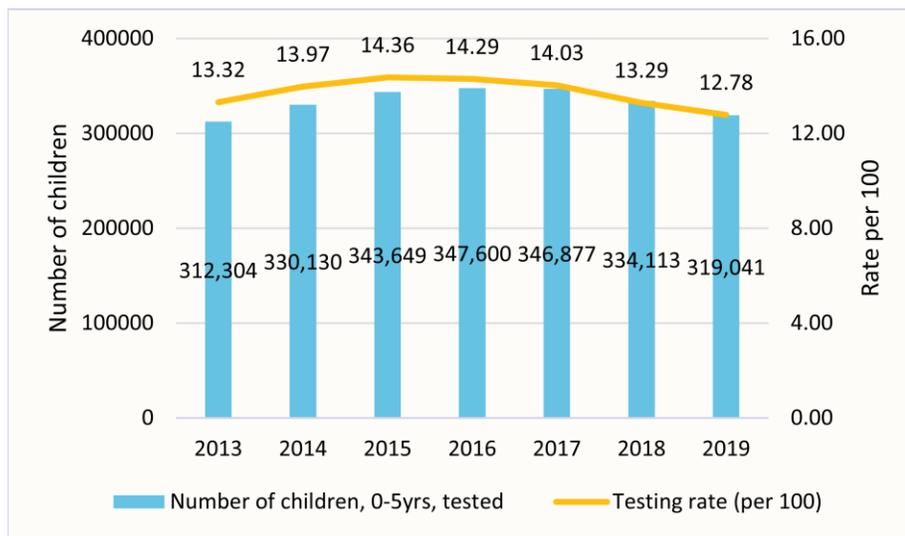


Figure 1 Data from [BLSB Tableau Map](#), updated date July 6th, 2020

Why is it important to report?

BLSB oversees the collection of all blood lead testing results for the State of Texas. Texas law requires providers to report all results to the BLSB. BLSB collects these reports and takes appropriate actions for every report received. Providers may get a call from our Case Coordination team about a child’s elevated blood lead level. There’s another important group that uses these results, our BLSB epidemiology team. Our epidemiology team calculates the rates for the state and its 254 counties. These rates provide a starting point to educate communities, health professionals, and leaders alike on the dangers of lead poisoning.

Every year, the BLSB epidemiology team analyzes all reported testing results to determine trends. From 2013 to 2016, we saw an increase in the number of children tested for each year. Since then, however, there’s a decrease in the number of children tested.

Why is it important to report every blood lead result? All reports help determine our state’s testing rate, and our state’s rate of elevated blood lead levels. Only reporting elevated results doesn’t give the whole picture of lead poisoning in Texas. We need to determine the rate of testing and elevated blood lead levels in the state with

What to Include In Your Report

When submitting your latest blood lead results, it’s important to assure the required fields are filled in. Texas Administrative Code requires the following information in every blood lead results reporting to BLSB:

- (a) The child’s name, address, date of birth, sex, race and ethnicity
- (b) The child’s blood lead level concentration, test date and name and telephone of testing laboratory
- (c) Whether the sample is capillary or venous
- (d) The name and city of the attending physician

You can learn more about the do’s and don’ts on reporting at: dshs.texas.gov/lead/Reporting-Laws-Administrative-Code.aspx

accuracy and precision. This is why it's important for providers to submit all results to BLSB.

And it's not just the state's rates that are affected by blood lead results. It affects the county and local health department. BLSB shares 'live' data with five local health departments. Which enables them to follow-up with cases in their jurisdictions and take action at the local level. BLSB also calculates rates for all 254 Texas counties. Having the full picture improves our efforts to help the community. The next time you do a blood test, don't forget to report it to BLSB!

5 Important Reasons to Follow-Up with Your Child's Blood Lead Test

At your child's check-ups, be sure they get tested for lead at ages 12 months and 24 months. But what if your child test comes back saying they have an elevated blood lead level? Now you have another appointment to go to, but is it necessary to come back for another test?

In short: yes, and here's why:

Lead poisoning is serious. Blood lead levels greater than 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ can affect your child's health in more ways than one. At 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, children can develop shorter attention spans and behavioral issues. At higher levels, children at risk of stomach pain, nerve damage, and delayed puberty. No amount of lead is safe for children.

Retests are different. The first test at the check-up lets you know if your child is lead poisoned. Re-tests check if lead levels are increasing or decreasing. Getting your child retested is an important step in eliminating lead exposure.

Retesting gives you a roadmap of what to do next. The goal is to decrease the level to 0. Your provider may share information with you on ways to reduce lead exposure. This can include education about nutrition, cleaning, etc. You and your child's doctor can work together to pinpoint the source of lead. You can take action to eliminate lead using these tools.

Retests keep you ahead of lead. It important to know what your child's lead level is. If necessary, it's important to take steps to decrease it. To know your child's lead level is to prevent lead from doing more harm to their health.

Retests are part of your child's health. Re-testing for lead is a routine part of eliminating lead poisoning. Like other things you do to protect your child (like, vaccines, using a car seat, eating nutritious foods); re-testing is another way to improve your child's health.



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