

GEORGE LATIMER, Westchester County Executive

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT RAISES AWARENESS
ABOUT LEAD EXPOSURE IN CHILDREN**
Lead Poisoning Prevention Week Oct. 25-31

(White Plains, NY) –County Executive George Latimer reminds residents that it is now more important than ever to assure children are protected from the harmful effects of lead exposure in their own homes.

Latimer said: “With so many children learning from home as well as in school during this pandemic, it is especially crucial to assure our homes are safe for children by identifying and removing sources of lead to prevent further exposure. I encourage all families to talk to their child’s healthcare provider about their child’s risk and need for testing.”

The County Health Department recognizes National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, which starts Oct. 25, as an opportunity to raise awareness in an effort to reduce childhood exposure to lead. Lead is a toxic mineral that can cause damage to the brain and other vital organs as well as decreased learning and behavior problems. All children, from six months to six years old, should have a lead assessment annually by their medical provider, and by New York State law, all children who are 1 and 2 years old must receive a blood lead test.

Since last October 1, when New York State improved regulations to better protect children from the effects of lead exposure, 147 children were identified as having been exposed to lead in 2019 and 149 children were similarly identified in 2020. The County Health Department is currently tracking 222 individuals with lead exposure and discharged or transferred 40 this year.

To protect Westchester’s youngest residents, the County Health Department also works to reduce lead exposure in pregnant women. The County Health Department is now tracking the progress of nine women to reduce their lead levels. The Department works with families and building owners to identify the sources of lead and assure they are removed, and will follow up after the women deliver to assess the exposure of their newborns.

The Department also follows the progress of any child under age 18 who arrives in this country with an elevated lead of five or above, to ensure that care continues wherever the child is placed. In the 12-month period that

ended September 30, 83 immigrant children who passed through or settled in Westchester had elevated lead levels.

Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD said: “We must do everything we can to keep children safe from lead. Its health effects can be devastating, but they are preventable. We ask that parents and caregivers respond promptly when notified that their child has an elevated blood lead level and keep all provider appointments to assess their child’s progress in reducing that blood lead level. It is equally important to cooperate with our staff to identify any lead risks where the child lives and spends time so these risks can be removed, remediated or contained. Working collaboratively, we can achieve the best outcomes for Westchester children.”

Amler said that if a child’s most recent blood lead test is elevated; their healthcare provider and the County Health Department will contact the family to help them manage the impact of lead on the child. The provider must confirm the elevated blood lead level by taking a blood sample drawn from a vein. Follow-up includes a detailed lead exposure assessment, a nutritional assessment and a developmental screening. The Health Department works with families to identify sources of lead at home and wherever the child spends the most time, so that lead can be removed.

About 500,000 American children between ages one and five have elevated levels of lead in their blood, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The top sources of lead in Westchester, from most frequent to least, are:

- Flaking or peeling lead-based paint in homes built before 1978
- Old painted wooden windows
- Lead dust on window sills, floors and toys
- Stained glass windows or casement windows with lead came (dividers)
- Ceramic pottery from other countries, particularly in Latin America, India and the Middle East
- And less frequently:
- Herbal medicines from the Middle East, Latin America, China and India
- Candy and spices from Mexico, the Middle East, Latin America, India and China
- Cosmetics from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Middle Eastern and African countries
- Costume jewelry and toys made in other countries and often sold in dollar and discount stores

Property owners of single-family or multi-family homes throughout Westchester are encouraged to [apply for the County’s Lead Safe Westchester \(LSW\) Program](#), made possible by a grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The LSW Program provides **FREE** improvements and repairs to reduce lead-based paint, dust and other safety hazards in housing units, built before 1978 where residents with low to moderate incomes reside. Priority is given to units housing children under the age of 6 and/or units where a pregnant woman lives. Funds are awarded on a first come, first served basis, based on the occupants’ eligibility and on a home inspection that determines the presence of lead. To request an application, property owners, landlords and tenants call 914-995-4602 or e-mail tkr3@westchestergov.com

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About Westchester County

Westchester County, located in the heart of the historic Hudson Valley, covers 500 square miles and has a population of just under a million. Originally home to Native Americans, who were members of the Lenape tribe, it is today a rich mix of many cultures and landscapes. The County is a blend of bustling cities, quaint villages and picturesque towns as well as open spaces and a network of beautiful parks. Westchester is made up of 6 cities, 19 towns and 20 villages. Westchester County is known for top-notch public schools, and a high quality of life. The County is also an intellectual capital, boasting a highly educated workforce, competitive colleges and universities, Fortune 500 companies, world changing non-profits, and cutting-edge research

centers. Westchester is led by County Executive George Latimer, who took office in January 2018 as the ninth County Executive. Using inclusion and openness as a foreground, Latimer is fighting to make Westchester a destination for all people to live, work and enjoy. Learn more about Westchester County by visiting www.westchestergov.com

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