

GEORGE LATIMER, Westchester County Executive

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COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT RAISES AWARENESS ABOUT LEAD EXPOSURE IN CHILDREN

Lower Threshold for Response to Lead Exposure Now In Effect

(White Plains, NY) – County Executive George Latimer wants Westchester parents and caregivers to know that new state regulations are now in effect to better protect children from the harmful effects of lead exposure.

Latimer said: “Our goal is to reach children affected at lower levels of exposure, to reduce lead exposure and its impact on children and to remove the sources of lead from their environment 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.”

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.

Going forward, Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD said that during the next 12 months, about 300 Westchester families can expect to be contacted by their children’s healthcare provider and by the County Health Department to help them manage the impact of lead on their children.

Families will be contacted if their child’s most recent blood lead test is elevated. Effective October 1, state regulations set 5 micrograms per deciliter as the threshold for an elevated blood lead level. Prior to October 1, to be considered elevated, the blood lead level had to reach 15 micrograms per deciliter.

This new reduced threshold triggers a required response from both the child’s medical provider and the Health Department. 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 the families to identify any sources of lead at home and wherever the child spends the most time, so lead can be removed to stop further negative health effects to the child.

Dr. Amler said: “Lead poisoning can cause devastating health effects, but it is also preventable. We must do everything we can to keep children safe from lead. To achieve the best outcome for Westchester children, we need the cooperation of parents and caregivers. We ask that they respond promptly when their provider or the Health Department notifies them that their child has an elevated blood lead level. It is equally important that parents and caregivers keep all provider appointments to assess a child’s progress in reducing his or her blood lead level. And, I urge parents to cooperate with health department environmental staff, who will visit the child’s home and other places where he or she spends the most time to identify any lead risks in their environment so these risks can be removed, remediated or contained.”

Dr. Amler said the Health Department had already reached out to pediatricians to remind them of the changes to the regulations.

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. In Westchester, at the end of 2018, 69 children had blood lead levels of 10 micrograms per deciliter or more; of these 29 children were receiving medical and environmental case management from the County Health Department. To date in 2019, 82 children were newly identified as needing these services. Case management continues, on average, for two years.

Lead can often be found here:

- Flaking or peeling lead-based paint in homes built before 1978
- Lead dust on window sills, floors and toys
- Plumbing pipes in homes built before 1985
- Soil around homes and buildings with exterior lead-based paint
- Ceramic pottery from other countries, particularly in Latin America, India and the Middle East
- Imported herbal medicines from the Middle East, Latin America, China and India
- Imported candy and spices from Mexico, the Middle East, Latin America, India and China
- Imported cosmetics from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Middle Eastern and African countries
- Imported costume jewelry and toys made in other countries and often sold in dollar and discount stores

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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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