

Wisconsin Department of Health Services: Lead abatement program receives federal approval

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The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) announced today they received approval from the Centers of Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to implement a health services initiative to provide [lead abatement services](#) in the homes of low-income children and pregnant women enrolled in [BadgerCare Plus](#) and [Medicaid](#). Governor Tony Evers' budget invested \$14.2 million in lead testing and abatement and \$2 million for the new Lead-Safe Homes Program.

"This is a great step toward my goal to 'get the lead out' of Wisconsin homes so that our families, and most of all our kids, don't have to worry about lead poisoning and the long term health and learning affects that come with it," said Governor Evers.

Improvements will include removing lead based paint and lead dust hazards, replacing fixtures such as faucets, and removing soil lead hazards. DHS will coordinate these efforts and ensure individuals providing lead abatement services are well trained and certified by the state. DHS will be directing these efforts statewide to ensure progress is made in eliminating lead hazards in the homes of those eligible for these services.

"Our initiative will help advance the efforts of this administration to eliminate the lead poisoning risks that threaten the health and well-being of young Wisconsinites," said DHS Secretary-designee Andrea Palm. "We will collaborate across local health departments and community organizations to ensure that the homes of low-income children and pregnant women are lead-free."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) say there is no safe level of lead in the body. Lead poisoned children have been identified in every county in Wisconsin. In 2016, of those tested, more than 4,000 Wisconsin children under six were found to have lead poisoning. Lead can interfere with brain development and can result in lower IQ, learning difficulties, reduced educational achievement, and greater likelihood of behavioral problems like aggression, hyperactivity, and delinquency.

If a pregnant woman is exposed to lead, possible complications to her pregnancy can occur. These complications can include miscarriage, premature birth, injury to the child's brain, kidney and nervous system, and learning or behavior problems for the child.

Lead poisoning is preventable. Since 1996, more than 220,000 children have been exposed to lead in our state. Children living in Milwaukee and Racine are at the greatest risk of exposure due to the volume of older housing stock, but any child who lives in a home built before 1978 is at risk for exposure. In 2012, the CDC lowered the blood lead threshold to 5 mcg/dl, down from 10 mcg/dl for children under age six. While no level of lead exposure is safe for children, those who test at or above that level warrant a public health response.