

Lead Poisoning

Lead poisoning is a highly toxic metal that can be found in lead-based materials, contaminated water, air, and soil. For many years, lead poisoning has been an ongoing issue in the state of Indiana. In 2019, the issue seemed to gain more problems after several reports of children (specifically minorities) being exposed to this substance. In South Bend, lead-based paint in old homes has been a problem for decades. But local officials began focusing on efforts to combat the problem, such as increasing testing, after the state released testing data in late 2016 that showed an unusually high percentage of children had elevated blood lead levels from 2005 through 2015 on the city's near northwest side.¹ Lead poisoning can lead to extreme sickness, especially in children whose bodies are still fragile to harsh diseases.

The Effects of Lead Poisoning Among Minorities

Most of Indiana's children are not tested for lead levels in their blood. Last year more than 70,000 children under 7 years old were tested and 1.4% had elevated levels, according to an Indiana Health Department report.² Exposure to lead can be determined by many environmental factors. When it comes to communities in Indiana that have lots of minorities, lead contamination is more prevalent due to the lack of economic funding in those areas.

Many children are unable to receive proper testing for lead exposure from their schools due to the costs being so high. In addition to this, financial struggles also prevent proper health inspections when it comes to water pipes, sinks, paint etc. Decades without cleaning pipes and monitoring other factors increases the likelihood of contamination. Federal law requires testing for children who are on Medicaid, but last year less than a quarter of low-income children were tested, the health department reported.³ Unfortunately, low-income children stereotypically fall under the minority category. Over the years, health issues among minorities haven't been prioritized enough by higher up government officials. Flint being a perfect example with their contaminated water crisis which has yet to be fixed.

State Laws and Regulations in Indiana

In 2019, more people are starting to make a change in the state of Indiana to prevent horrific statistics from rising in communities. Senate Bill 322 calls for the Indiana State Health Department to provide a questionnaire to primary health providers that would be used to determine if children should be tested for lead. Depending on how families answer questions,

¹ Ted Booker, "Indiana Bill Aims to Increase Lead Poisoning Tests for Children," South Bend Tribune, February 5, 2018, https://www.southbendtribune.com/news/local/indiana-bill-aims-to-increase-lead-poisoning-tests-for-children/article_86e01d64-0588-5a50-ba0b-debe54957927.html

² Emma Kate Fittes, "Indiana Lawmakers Call for Lead Testing Law after Elevated Water Levels Were Found in Some Marion County Schools," Chalkbeat (Chalkbeat, November 22, 2019), <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/in/2019/11/22/indiana-lawmakers-call-for-lead-testing-law-after-elevated-water-levels-were-found-in-some-marion-county-schools/>

³ Emma Kate Fittes. "Indiana Lawmakers Call for Lead Testing Law after Elevated Water Levels Were Found in Some Marion County Schools."

physicians could either recommend or require blood lead tests for children.⁴ For now, parents of kindergarteners and first-graders in two of Indianapolis' largest school districts — Indianapolis Public Schools and Pike Township Schools — and mayor-authorized charter schools can opt to have their child receive a free lead screening.⁵

When it comes to the black community, the NAACP has recently partnered with schools to create programs that will allow free lead testing. The NAACP approached the Marion County Public Health Department about implementing an initiative to test schoolchildren to identify those for whom intervention would make a difference in their future. The health department has now partnered with IPS, Pike schools, and the mayor's charter schools.⁶ As of today, the NAACP has successfully opened a free testing center for Marion County schools.

Government Funding & Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated Call to Action

Governmental agencies such as the CDC (Center for disease Control) are highly aware of the ongoing issues happening in the state of Indiana when it comes to lead poisoning. CDC supports state and local health departments, or their bona fide agents, through cooperative agreements to support childhood lead poisoning prevention activities including strengthening: blood lead testing and reporting, surveillance, linking children to recommended follow-up services, and targeted population-based interventions.⁷ In fiscal year 2019, the State of Indiana received \$441,246 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for childhood lead poisoning prevention programmatic activities.⁸

Delta is a public service organization that is dedicated to serving the black community in the best way possible. When it comes to this issue, the Indiana State Department of Health does provide funding programs that Sorors can support. It is unclear whether this corporation accepts donations or not, but if possible, Sorors could donate to the cause. The Greater Indianapolis NAACP Branch #3053, in partnership with IU McKinney School of Law, will host a public forum on January 29 to highlight the dangers posed to children by lead in the water, soil and their homes, and what steps the Hoosier state could take to reduce exposure.⁹ Sorors can also attend public meetings with the NAACP in their local areas to further discuss these issues as well.

⁴ Ted Booker, "Indiana Bill Aims to Increase Lead Poisoning Tests for Children."

⁵ Ted Booker

⁶ Shari Rudavsky, "Lead Poisoning Hits Kids under 7 Hardest. These Indy Schools Will Start Testing for It.," Indianapolis Star (Indianapolis Star, September 26, 2019), <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/health/2019/09/26/naacp-hogsett-county-health-officials-urge-lead-testing-in-schools/2440396001/>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/programs/default.htm>

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/programs/in.htm>

⁹ "IU McKinney, NAACP to Host Lead Forum," IU Robert H. McKinney School of Law, accessed January 28, 2020, <https://mckinneylaw.iu.edu/news/releases/2020/01/iu-mckinney-naacp-to-host-lead-forum-.html>