

Lead Poisoning in Denver



Lead poisoning causes permanent brain damage and learning disabilities in young children. About 100 children are discovered with lead poisoning in Denver each year. They are typically discovered through routine

blood testing, not because of signs or symptoms. Unfortunately, only about 15-percent of Denver's children are tested for lead each year so we really do not know how many children are actually poisoned each year.

Most children get lead poisoning from lead-based paint although some are poisoned by other things like pottery, jewelry, or candy containing lead. Usually the poisoning occurs through ingestion of the lead through normal hand-to-mouth activities. Over time, the lead builds up in the child's body.

Lead-based paint was available until 1978. However, we have found in Denver that homes built before 1940 present the highest risk for lead poisoning. Lead-based paint was used extensively in these homes on the interior and the exterior. These homes also tend to have double-hung windows with wood window frames painted with lead-based paint. When these old windows are opened and closed, a little bit of lead dust or small paint chips come off due to the friction. This lead dust ends up on the windowsill or on the floor where young children can access it.

The condition of the house plays a significant role in the risk for lead poisoning. Intact lead-based paint is relatively safe. Therefore, homes that are well maintained are often low-risk. However, the old wood-framed windows mentioned above and other areas with friction or rubbing (like doors that do not fit quite right, or built-in cabinets) can still pose a problem. Even if the paint looks intact, if there is friction, lead dust can be generated. Pre-1940 homes in distressed condition with old wood-framed windows pose a very high risk for lead poisoning.

Home renovations can also result in lead poisoning of young children. Many people purchase old "fixer-uppers." Renovations must be done carefully if young children or pregnant women are in the home. Sanding old moldings, replacing windows, and scraping and repainting can generate a significant amount of lead dust if not done using "lead-safe" work practices. It is possible to hire contractors that are specially trained in lead-safe work practices. Alternatively, "do-it-yourself" owners can find information on these methods from the pamphlet *Reducing Lead Hazards When Remodeling Your Home* (available on www.HUD.gov or email Wendy Hawthorne (see contact information below).

Denver is fortunate to have a lead-hazard control program operated by the Northeast Denver Housing Center. This program can assist low- to moderate-income homeowners and property owners willing to rent at an affordable

rate to make their homes lead-safe. The program also provides contractor training, free blood testing, and community outreach and education.

The Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning in Denver has recently completed a draft strategic plan for the city. The plan includes recommendations for expanded education and outreach, increased blood testing of children, improved housing conditions, and new code language. If these recommendations are adopted, we believe lead poisoning in Denver can be eliminated.

Contact Wendy Hawthorne of Groundwork Denver at 303-455-5600 or wendy.hawthorne@groundworkdenver.org for more information or to schedule a presentation for your neighborhood association.

For the Denver Lead Hazard Control Program contact Katie Sullivan, Northeast Denver Housing Center, 303-377-3334, ksullivan@nedenverhousing.org.

Editor's Note: The INC Public Safety committee recommends that the INC Delegation vote in favor of the following proposed amendments at this month's meeting.

Nuisance Abatement

by Lisa Dobson, Chair, Public Nuisance Abatement Oversight Committee.

This spring, proposed implementation of amendments to Article III, Civil Abatement of Public Nuisances of the Denver Revised Municipal code were presented to Doug Linkhart and the Public Safety Committee of City Council with the support of the Denver Police Department's Division Chief of Patrol, Mary Beth Klee, and Paul Puckett of the City Attorney Office.

Denver's Public Nuisance Abatement ordinance is being nationally recognized as an effective tool. Other cities are patterning their own public nuisance abatement programs based on Denver's.

The amendments proposed will include as public nuisances any property or vehicles used to:

Keep, maintain, control, rent, or make available property for the unlawful distribution or manufacture of a controlled substance or the unlawful possession of materials to make amphetamine and methamphetamine or the unlawful sales or distribution of materials to manufacture controlled substances or possession of one or more chemicals or supplies or equipment with intent to manufacture a controlled substance.

(2) Commit felony criminal mischief to property where the aggregate damage exceeds \$500 (graffiti, etc.).

If you agree with this change, please express your support of these amendments to City Council and the DPD Division Chief of Patrol Office. With your vocal and written support, Denver can keep pushing towards the goal of creating a safer city with improved quality of life in Denver's neighborhoods. If you don't actively push for this, it won't happen.