
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week

GRAND RAPIDS – Lead poisoning has been on the minds of many in Michigan in recent months. While the numbers are dropping in Kent County, children with dangerous levels of lead in their blood continue to be a public health concern. To bring awareness to the issue, the Kent County Health Department (KCHD) joins the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in recognizing National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week October 25-31.

Lead poisoning is especially damaging to children, as it disrupts development of the nervous system. Symptoms include pain, confusion, headaches, and can lead to seizures and coma. It can cause behavior and/or learning disorders. According to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, 470 children in Kent County under the age of six tested for high lead levels in 2014 (defined as 5 micrograms or more per deciliter of blood).

The vast majority of those children impacted live within the City of Grand Rapids. “The reason this happens is directly related to the age of the housing stock in Grand Rapids,” says Joan Dyer Zyskowski, supervisor of the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program of the Kent County Health Department (KCHD). “Lead poisoning is almost always linked to lead based paint in older homes.” Lead was banned from paint in 1978. Eighty percent of the homes in Grand Rapids were built before then and likely contain lead paint. Less than sixty percent of the homes in Kent County were built prior to the ban.

KCHD works closely with the City of Grand Rapids, the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, and the Rental Property Owners Association to respond to lead poisonings. Lead in peeling and chipping paint, paint dust and soil can pose serious health hazards if not taken care of properly. People who live in homes built before 1978 should keep children and pregnant women away from chipped or peeling paint as well as repairs in the home that disturb old paint.

Recently in Flint, a number of children were found to have elevated lead levels after a change in the municipal water source. Lead poisoning from a municipal water source is very rare and is not considered a viable threat in Kent County.

The State of Michigan’s Lead Safe Home program has added Kent County as a target area. The program offers homeowners and landlords the opportunity to apply for special funding for lead hazard control work. For more information call toll free (866) 691-5323, www.michigan.gov/leadsafe.

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 265 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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