



Robert P. Astorino, Westchester County Executive

NEWS RELEASE

Sherlita Amler, MD, Commissioner, Department of Health

Ned McCormack, Communications Director

Contact: Caren Halbfinger (914) 813-5013 / after hours: 813-5000

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE ASTORINO REMINDS PARENTS TO KEEP THEIR HOMES LEAD SAFE Health Department Observes National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week

To highlight National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, which runs through Oct.31, Westchester County Executive Robert P. Astorino encourages parents to take care to keep their homes lead-safe and to keep products that may contain lead away from their young children.

“Our health department has lots of practical tips to help parents keep their older homes lead-safe for young children, so I encourage you to visit our website to learn more,” Astorino said.

Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD, advises parents to assure their young children are assessed annually for lead exposure by their medical provider from the time they are six months old until they reach age six. All children at ages one and two years should receive a blood lead test. Pregnant women should also be assessed for lead exposure by their prenatal health care provider because lead exposure can cause miscarriage or low birth weight.

“Lead poisoning can cause devastating health effects, so we must do everything in our power to keep children safe from lead,” Dr. Amler said. “Avoid cooking, storing or serving food in pottery made outside the U.S. unless you are sure it does not contain lead. It’s a good idea to err on the side of caution with anything that could go in a child’s mouth or close to the eyes, where lead can be absorbed. This includes toys, spices and play jewelry made outside the U.S.”

If your home was built before 1978, it may contain lead paint, sometimes under layers of newer paint. If the paint is in good shape, the lead paint is usually not a problem. Peeling, chipping, chalking, cracking, damaged or damp lead-based paint is a hazard that needs immediate attention. It also may be a hazard when found on surfaces that children can chew, or that get a lot of wear-and-tear, such as windows and window sills, doors and door frames, stairs, railings, banisters and porches. Keep all paint in excellent shape and clean up dust frequently to protect your family from the hazard of lead dust.

When you buy a home built prior to 1978, ask for a lead inspection. If your home was built before 1978 and you hire a contractor to renovate, repair and/or paint, the Environmental Protection Agency requires that your contractor be certified by the EPA or an EPA authorized state and follows lead-safe work practices. If you are doing the work yourself, to avoid creating dangerous lead dust, set up safely, control the dust and clean up completely to protect your family and home. For more on what to do, go to the lead poisoning prevention page at westchestergov.com/health.

More

Here's what you can routinely do to minimize a child's exposure to lead:

- Clean up peeling paint and paint chips often, using a wet mop or sponge and an all purpose degreasing cleaner.
- Use a wet mop and a damp dusting cloth to avoid adding lead dust to the air that children will breathe.
- Wash children's hands frequently, particularly before meals and snacks and after playing outdoors. Supervise small children closely to ensure they only put food in their mouths, not paint chips, jewelry or toys, which could contain lead.
- Feed children a well balanced diet high in calcium and iron, which can minimize their exposure to lead. Cheese, yogurt, beans and dark, leafy green vegetables are good sources of calcium and iron.
- Don't let children play with imported jewelry, toys, make-up or eat candy, which can contain lead or lead paint.
- Avoid serving food in pottery if you are unsure about whether there could be lead in the glaze.

Lead in drinking water is rarely a significant source of lead poisoning. However, if you are unsure about the level of lead in your drinking water, use only water from the cold water tap for cooking and drinking or making a baby's formula. Run cold water for three to five minutes in the morning to flush out any lead which may have leached into the water during the night. Hot water picks up more lead from pipes and solder. If more than six hours have gone by since a tap was last turned on, run the water until it becomes cooler before using it for cooking or drinking.

Throughout the year, the health department's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program staffers educate parents and providers about the dangers of lead exposure; provides surveillance and monitoring of blood lead level data to identify trends and populations at risk for lead exposures; conduct investigations in the home and other places where lead poisoned children spend time to identify lead hazards and work to remediate those hazards. The Program maintains a lead poisoning registry for the medical case management of Westchester County children diagnosed by their primary care providers with lead poisoning and collaborates with providers to reduce levels of lead exposure.

New cases of lead poisoning continue to occur, caused primarily by lead hazards in the home. The health department is currently tracking the health status of 103 children who were identified with elevated lead levels through routine blood lead tests, including 25 that were identified this year. At low blood lead levels, lead can adversely affect a child's ability to learn. At high levels, lead is an acute poison that can cause developmental delays, seizures, and in severe cases, death. There is no known safe level of lead in the body.

If you live in certain parts of Westchester, the county health department can offer a free home inspection and risk assessment for lead paint hazards to prevent children from become lead poisoned. Residents can schedule a free home assessment by calling the health department at 914-813-5000 if they live in these zip codes: 10701 and 10705 in Yonkers; 10801 in New Rochelle; 10606 in White Plains; and 10550 in Mount Vernon. This service is available because the county receives additional state grant funding because of its many older homes and significant number of lead-poisoned children.

For more information about lead poisoning prevention, call the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or go to www.westchestergov.com/health.