

Blood Lead Levels – Standards Up For Review

Every four years, the Center for Disease Control analyzes blood lead levels of children. Children under six whose blood levels test above 5 milligrams of lead per deciliter have enough lead in their body for the CDC to recommend a public health response. Before 2012, the level causing concern was twice as high as today's. The level change expanded the potential number of children needing treatment from 150,000 to 535,000. With a new National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey from 2016, there are rumors that the CDC will again lower the reference blood lead levels from 5 mg of lead per deciliter to 3.5 mg.

How Does the Lead Get There?

Lead exposure is declining in the U.S. Levels of lead in children's bloodstream have fallen over 90% since the use of lead in paint and gasoline was banned almost forty years ago. So where is the lead coming from? The majority of the children above the reference levels of lead are primarily exposed to lead in their homes. In addition to older homes with lead-based paints and toxic soil, contaminated water is becoming common (Flint, MI is only the most publicized case).

Lead does not belong in the body. The fact that the reference level for lead in children's blood may be lowered again is a good thing, as raising awareness and preventing lead exposure whenever possible is incredibly important. Awareness is good, but for this potential level change, local government follow-through will be likely be limited. The CDC doesn't actually have any regulatory power with this issue, and local labs and lead testing devices are rarely accurate around the new proposed levels, 3.5 mg.

There is also the issue of cost. Lead safety programs around the country last year were allocated a 17 million dollar budget, which resulted in understaffing and an inability to handle the cases already present. The last time the lead references levels were lowered, the number of children affected by that change almost tripled. If another shift like that occurs without a corresponding budget change, it's likely communities will be unable to rise to the challenge set by the CDC.

What Can You Do at Home?

The average blood lead level in children 1-5 years old is from 1 to 1.3 mg. Even if you or your children aren't exposed to lead-based paint on a regular basis, the likelihood of lead being in the body is very high (if only at low levels). While the CDC is raising awareness among medical health and government officials, they are less clear on how you can help yourself.

There are ways to remove lead and other heavy metals from the body (called chelation) by adding common, healthy foods like garlic and cilantro to the diet. The higher the blood lead levels, the more likely a medical professional needs to intervene. You can address your lead level every day before it becomes a toxic overload by doing something as simple as sprinkling raw garlic on your salad or dinner.

Recommended Reading:

Sources:

- *Exclusive: CDC considers lowering threshold level for lead exposure* – Reuters
- *Lead exposure in children: a guide to U.S. standards* – Reuters
- *What Do Parents Need to Know to Protect Their Children* –

CDC.gov

- *Top 5 Foods That Detox Heavy Metal and Toxins – With Protocol* – Organic Lifestyle Magazine