

A Statement from the Michigan Child Lead Exposure Elimination Commission: A Necessary Focus on Lead Paint and Dust in Housing to Achieve Lead Exposure Elimination Goals

Summary

The vision of the Michigan Child Lead Exposure Elimination Commission (CLEEC) is to achieve a state free of lead exposure to benefit the health of Michigan's children. Progress with ongoing programs to eliminate lead in drinking water is essential and to be celebrated. To meet our goal by 2030, however, Michigan's lead response needs to increase attention to paint and dust in homes and soil.

Background: National attention to the ongoing problem of lead exposure, along with the understanding that lead is an environmental justice issue^{1,2} and that there is no safe level of lead in blood,³ have resulted in a transformation of lead exposure policies and prevention practices. Notably, at the federal and state levels major policy changes have directed resources to the elimination of lead in drinking water.^{4,5}

Michigan has worked effectively and swiftly to address the elimination of lead from drinking water. Replacement of lead service lines has been completed or is underway in many Michigan municipal water systems.⁶ State and local agencies have been partnering to promote replacement of older plumbing fixtures. Currently MDHHS is embarking on a strategy in partnership with local communities to promote the use of lead-reducing water filters in Michigan homes, called "[Get Ahead of Lead](#)".

The CLEEC,⁷ which was established in 2017 as an advisory commission the Governor of Michigan in response to the Flint water crisis, applauds the state's progress in eliminating lead in Michigan's drinking water. At the same time, the CLEEC remains committed to Michigan's work in eliminating lead exposure from all sources because lead exposure is large in scale and because there are effective, evidence-based interventions to eliminate lead exposure sources. Furthermore, lead exposure elimination work centers environmental justice and child health equity, given that children living in older, deteriorating homes bear a disproportionate burden of lead exposure and are more likely to be low income or members of historically marginalized communities.

Review of the Data: After reviewing available evidence, the CLEEC recognizes that the primary lead exposure threat is from incidental ingestion of dust contaminated by lead paint in pre-1978 homes and ubiquitously lead-contaminated Michigan soil. While lead in water contributes in varying amounts to a child's blood lead level,^{8,9,10,11,12} **lead paint and lead paint-contaminated dust and soil are the predominant sources of children's exposure to lead.**^{13,14,15}

Lead paint hazards concentrate in older and deteriorating homes. Michigan bears a large burden of homes with these characteristics: almost three million houses built before 1978, with more than one million of those built before 1950. In 2022 in Michigan, 4,013 children with elevated blood lead were identified (3.4% of the children under age six who were tested), and the primary lead source was likely related to lead-based paint in their homes in most cases.¹⁶ When these hazards result in even a small

change in the blood lead level, they can cause profound and irreversible damage to children's brains and other body systems.

Because children's blood lead levels are associated primarily with lead dust in the home environment,^{6,17,18} **a clear priority for large-scale protection of children from lead exposure is the elimination of lead paint and dust in the home.** Furthermore, the abatement of lead hazards in homes has been found to be cost-effective when weighed against the costs of lead-associated healthcare, crime, and other economic outcomes.^{19,20,21}

"Investment in lead remediation/abatement pays for itself in just over 3 years and beyond that provides many years of positive returns."

Ecology Center, 2016²⁰

Our Ask: Investments and policy are urgently needed to increase the number of older homes in Michigan that are well-maintained, tested for lead hazards and have hazards abated. Investments are also needed for the infrastructure necessary to expand well-maintained and lead-safe housing, including training the lead abatement workforce, updating enforcement of lead-based paint hazard control laws, and developing local property maintenance ordinances that promote the maintenance or removal of lead-based paint in older housing using safe work practices.

Conclusion: In pursuit of environmental justice and child health and in pursuit of the CLEEC's 2030 goal to eliminate child lead exposure, current programs to address lead in drinking water should continue, while additional robust policies, strategies and resources for the next decade must focus on lead paint and dust hazards in housing. As with removing lead from drinking water, residential lead abatement will save taxpayer dollars and improve the lives of Michigan's children, who cannot be free from the threat of lead exposure until all sources are eliminated.

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⁴ [FACT SHEET: The Biden-Harris Lead Pipe and Paint Action Plan | The White House](#)

⁵ [ED 2021-09, Ensuring safe drinking water \(final signed\).pdf \(govdelivery.com\)](#)

⁶ See for example: ["Lansing WBL gains national attention for lead pipe replacement"](#)

⁷ [Child Lead Exposure Elimination Commission \(michigan.gov\)](#)

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