

# Lead free homes: Protecting children from a lifetime of consequences



As a result of lead poisoning, children may experience a lifetime of adverse outcomes.



*by Andrew Neuhauser, managing attorney*

It's been said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. That is certainly the case when it comes to lead poisoning.

In Ohio last year, [almost 3000 children under the age of 6](#) had a confirmed blood test indicating they were lead poisoned - a term that covers any child with a blood lead level of at least five micrograms per deciliter. These incidents of lead poisoning covered every corner of the state - at least one child in each of Ohio's 88 counties was lead poisoned in 2022.

As a result of lead poisoning, these kids may experience a lifetime of adverse outcomes. Here are some of the known consequences of lead poisoning:

- [Lower cognitive function](#). An elevated blood lead level of ten micrograms per deciliter is believed to cause a drop in IQ scores of about four to eight points. As the elevated blood lead level increases to twenty-five micrograms per deciliter, an additional two to four IQ points are lost.
- [Attention deficits and behavioral challenges](#). Children in the fifth quintile for blood lead (more than 2.0 micrograms per deciliter) have been found to be four times more likely to have been diagnosed as having attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and be on associated medications.
- Poor executive functions, including strategic planning, control of impulses, organized searching, flexibility of thought and action, and self-monitoring of behavior. In [one study](#), preschoolers with higher blood lead levels performed worse in the areas of working memory, focused attention, attentional flexibility, planning, and problem solving.
- [Deficient visual-motor skills](#). Studies have shown that compromised visual-motor skills are associated with early lead exposure.
- [Deficient speech and language skills](#). While research has indicated this link for several decades, more recent studies show that young adolescents with higher bone lead burdens have decreased language processing performance, especially with more advanced tasks
- [Deficient fine and gross motor skills](#). One study of 157 children in Cincinnati showed “significant associations between postnatal lead exposure and vestibular and neuromotor performance” in a level likely to cause issues with later academic and vocational success.
- [Increased need for special education services](#). Because lead poisoning has been linked to declines in IQ, increased behavioral issues, and deficient development, children are more likely to need special education services.
- Decreased high school graduation. Students with an elevated blood lead level have poorer end-of-grade test scores and are less likely to graduate from high school. In fact, [when non-lead poisoned children have classmates who are lead poisoned](#), they also become less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to be suspended from school.

- [Lower earning potential and higher economic burdens.](#) Each child who is lead poisoned has a lifetime economic burden of about \$212,000, a figure that includes decreased productivity, increased spending for health care, education, and social assistance, and premature mortality. For the Ohio children who tested positive in 2022, this amounts to \$622 million in economic costs - a figure that repeats itself each year as more children are lead poisoned.
- [Increased crime.](#) Lead poisoning has been linked to higher rates of arrest, particularly for violent crimes, for young adults who had elevated blood lead levels as children.

A significant source of lead exposure in infants and small children is a home. While lead paint was eliminated from the commercial paint supply in 1978, [the housing stock in northeast Ohio is relatively old](#) - putting more children at risk. [Rental housing can be particularly harmful](#) when lead is present because several groups of children can live in the house in a relatively short period of time.

Currently, there are very few proactive programs in Ohio to prevent lead poisoning. [Cleveland](#) and [Toledo](#) have laws that require inspections of rental properties. In all other parts of the state - including all parts of Community Legal Aid's eight-county service area - houses are normally inspected for lead only after a child has been poisoned by lead. Our young children are the canaries in the coalmine of lead poisoning.

As our communities continue a dialogue about safe and affordable housing, quality education, and youth violence, remediating lead in homes can be an important first step. The youngest members of our communities count on us to take the steps necessary to ensure that they can live a life free from the lifelong effects of lead poisoning.

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Last updated on May 24, 2023.

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