

# Community Legal Aid

A non-profit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income individuals and families in central northeast Ohio



[www.communitylegalaid.org](http://www.communitylegalaid.org)

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## Lead Awareness Week: Prevention is possible

by Andrew Neuhauser, managing attorney

There is a saying: “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” No where could this be more true than when it comes to protecting our children.

It's with this context in mind that child health advocates around the state keep a close eye on lead level data released daily by the Ohio Department of Health.

By looking at the numbers, it would appear that 2020 saw the lowest number in nearly 15 years of kids under age 6 testing high for lead levels in their system.

But numbers don't tell the whole story.

We know that since the start of the pandemic, kids have been getting tested less for lead poisoning. In 2020, about 23,000 fewer Ohio children were tested for lead poisoning - a decrease of about 15 percent from a normal year. About 3 percent of children test positive for lead, so hundreds of Ohio children were lead poisoned in 2020 but their parents and doctors didn't know.

We also know that kids have been spending more time at home. When the state shutdown in March of last year, kids weren't just home for school. Libraries, local YMCAs, even arts and cultural programs closed to the public. School, recreation, everything happened from home.

But what happens when those homes are poisoning our kids?

Homes built before 1978 are at greatest risk for lead poisoning because they were built before lead based paint was made illegal. The EPA estimates that roughly 87% of homes from this era have lead paint. And about two thirds of homes in Ohio were built before 1978.

Paint isn't the only place lead lurks. It can be found in water (from pipes), as seen in the high-profile and heartbreaking stories of Flint, among others. It can also be found in the soil around high-risk homes, having leached into the same soil families may be gardening in.

And because these homes are disproportionately in poor neighborhoods with high minority populations, Black children are three times more likely nationally to be poisoned than white children. And in Akron, for example, the highest concentration of lead poisoning cases is in predominantly Black and Asian neighborhoods.

The impact of lead is permanent. Doctors can remove a lot of the lead from your system once it's there but the effects remain.

It's also extremely damaging, causing developmental delays and impacting children's ability to learn and grow, as well as their behavior.

What all this points to is generations of children, in particular minority children, whose pathways in life are being permanently altered.

This week, Community Legal Aid recognizes National Lead Poisoning Prevention Awareness Week by highlighting the dangerous and disproportionate impacts of lead poisoning. We also are sharing resources below to learn more about lead poisoning data, as well as programs that are helping remove lead from Ohio homes.

Please join us in spreading awareness about lead poisoning. Forward this email. Follow us on social media and share our posts this week about lead. Click the resources below.

Prevention is possible, but only if we all take it seriously and do our part to help find and share solutions.

*This article is part of Legal Aid's "Big Ideas" series.*

## **Resources**

[Lead Removal Grants](#)

[Licensed Lead Specialists](#)

[Hazardous Ohio Properties](#)

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Printed: December 3, 2021

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