

Environmental Health

Elevated childhood blood lead levels

Lead is toxic to people of all ages, but young children are the most at risk for adverse health effects. Normal childhood behaviors, such as crawling and hand-to-mouth contact, contribute to increased exposure to lead in the environment during a period of rapid brain development.

In May 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revised the blood lead level (BLL) at which children are considered elevated. Based on the absence of an identified blood lead level (BLL) without deleterious effects, combined with the evidence that these effects appear to be irreversible, CDC eliminated the term “level of concern” and adopted a new elevated BLL reference value of ≥ 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$.

From 2010-2017, a total of 805 Oregon children had confirmed BLLs at or above 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ (Figure 1). Of those children, 227 had confirmed blood lead levels ≥ 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$.

FIGURE 1

Children aged <6 years with confirmed elevated blood lead levels (BLL) by year, Oregon



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

Additional Resources:

[Health Care Provider Lead Screening Questionnaire. Portland, OR: Oregon Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, OHA; 2011](#)

[CDC Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention. Recommendations of the Advisory Committee for Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2012](#)

About the Data: Data include confirmed elevated blood lead levels where there is either one venous blood test or two capillary blood tests <12 weeks apart that are ≥ 5 ug/dL.

As of 2011, all blood lead test results regardless of level are notifiable by law in Oregon.

All children who are enrolled in Medicaid/Oregon Health Plan must be tested for lead at 12 and 24 months of age as required by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. If there is no record of a lead test before age 6, the child must be tested.

All children who are not enrolled in Medicaid/Oregon Health Plan should be screened for lead exposure risks using [Oregon's Lead Screening Questionnaire](#). The Oregon Health Authority recommends testing if there are any responses of "Yes" or "Don't know" on the questionnaire.

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[Oregon State Health Profile](#)

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