



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR

VIRGINIA PRESSLER, M.D.
DIRECTOR

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Hawaii Department of Health awarded \$361K in funding for childhood lead poisoning prevention efforts

HONOLULU - The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) Children with Special Health Needs Branch has been awarded \$361,956 in cooperative agreement funding from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the Hawaii Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (HI-CLPPP).

The federal funding will support the state's efforts to reduce lead exposure and lead poisoning for Hawaii children under the age of six. Exposure to lead can seriously harm a child's health; increase the risks for damage to the brain and nervous system; slow growth and development; and result in learning, behavioral, hearing and speech problems. Young children are at the highest risk for lead exposure because they engage in more hand-to-mouth activity, and a child's developing nervous system is more susceptible to the effects of lead.

"Early screening and testing to identify and prevent lead exposure in young children helps ensure the healthy development of our *keiki*," said Dr. Patricia Heu, chief of the DOH Children with Special Health Needs Branch. "This new funding will improve our processes to identify lead-exposed children and link their families with services to find and remove the source of lead. This will help to protect that child and other children in the family from further exposure."

According to DOH data from 2011 to 2015, nearly 60,000 children under the age of six in Hawaii were tested for lead. Of those tested, 1,700 children (about 3 percent) had elevated blood lead levels.

"Recent research shows that there is no safe blood lead level in children." said Danette Wong Tomiyasu, Health Resources Administration deputy director. "Keeping our *keiki* safe from lead hazards and lead poisoning requires collaborative efforts between our state programs, healthcare professionals, and our community. The department is committed to working with these groups to promote the healthy development of young children and to support their future success in school and life."

The cooperative agreement funding will enable DOH to address the complex problem of childhood lead poisoning using a collaborative approach with state and community partners. The department's Hazard Evaluation and Emergency Response Office, Indoor and Radiological Health Branch/Lead-Based Paint Program, and Public Health Nursing Branch are working together with the Children with Special Health Needs Branch to implement the HI-CLPPP program.

HI-CLPPP's purpose is to reduce lead exposure and lead poisoning for children under the age of six through strengthening blood lead level testing, surveillance, prevention, and processes to identify lead-exposed children and link them to services. Strategies and activities under the new grant will include:

- Updating guidelines for blood lead testing.
- Implementing a new lead database as a public health management tool.
- Education and outreach to communities and providers.
- Coordinating with other agencies, partners and stakeholders serving children to ensure that a comprehensive system of identification, referral, services and follow-up is in place for lead-exposed children.

Sources of lead exposure for children may include lead in paint or paint dust in houses built before 1978 when lead-based paint in housing was banned. Children may also be exposed to lead by family members who work with or have hobbies that involve contact with lead such as auto repair, welding, construction and home renovation. Other sources of lead may include fishing sinkers, jewelry, toys, glazed pottery and folk medicine made in foreign countries.

Being aware of the sources of lead and taking precautions can help protect young children from the serious effects of lead poisoning. Families can ask their doctor to test their child for lead, even if the child seems healthy. Families living in homes built before 1978 should keep children's play areas free of paint chips and dust and take extra precaution when doing home renovation to prevent the spread of lead dust. Family members who work with lead are advised to keep work clothes and shoes away from children.

More information can be found at the department's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention website at <http://health.hawaii.gov/cshcn/leadpp/>.

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