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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 24, 2023

23-133

October 22-28 is National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week

Learn how to keep your keiki safe from lead exposure

HONOLULU – Lead is a toxic metal that can be dangerous to your health, particularly for young children as it hinders the development of the brain. There is no safe level of lead for a child and those exposed to lead have trouble with learning, school performance, attention, and other neurocognitive problems. October 22 to 28 is National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, to increase awareness about lead poisoning so families can reduce children's exposure to lead and prevent its serious health effects.

The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH), [Hawai'i Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program \(HI-CLPPP\)](#), receives funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help the community prevent children from being exposed to lead, to identify children already exposed to lead so the source can be removed, and to link families to recommended services. One referral service is DOH's [Hi'ilei Developmental Screening Program](#), a free resource for children from birth to 5 years old, that provides developmental screenings and information for families.

“Keiki may be exposed to sources of lead in their everyday environment like lead-based paint, contaminated soil, contaminated dust, and other common products around the house,” said Dr. Ruben Frescas, chief of DOH's Children with Special Health Needs Branch. “Young children like to play on the ground and put their hands or other objects in their mouth, putting them at risk for swallowing or breathing in the lead in the environment around them.”

The issue of lead poisoning is particularly relevant considering the recent ash sampling in Kula, where elevated levels of lead were found. In addition, DOH expects that the ash in Lahaina will have a similar contaminant profile, as Phase 1 hazard removal by the EPA nears completion and testing is conducted.

Paint is the most common source of lead exposure in Hawai'i due to the use of lead-based paints on houses built before 1978. Lead dust from old paint falling apart can get on things inside and outside a home or building. Lead dust is very fine and cannot be seen.

Like paint, lead used to be mixed in gasoline, which has contaminated the soil around busy roads. Lead can also be found in fishing sinkers; jewelry; souvenirs; toys made before 2012; spices or foods from outside of the U.S.; and antique or old plates, bowls, glasses, and mugs.

The best way to know if a child has been exposed to lead is to have their blood tested. Blood testing for lead is readily available and can be used for all ages to determine lead exposure.

The CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend testing of children at increased risk for lead exposure. Children at increased risk include those who live or spend time in a house or building built before 1978; those who are from low-income households, immigrants, refugees, or recently adopted from less-developed countries; and those who live or spend time with someone who works with lead or has hobbies that expose them to lead. Children enrolled in Medicaid are required to get tested for lead at ages 12 months and 24 months, or from ages 24 to 72 months, if they have no record of ever being tested.

HI-CLPPP hosts free lead testing stations at events throughout the year and distributes coloring books and flyers to help educate children and families about lead poisoning prevention. Families can test soil and objects from around their home, school, or business. Lead test results are instant, with experts available for any questions.

Upcoming lead testing events include:

- October 28, 11 a.m to 5 p.m. – [Keiki Health Fair](#) presented by Kōkua Lāhainā Rising, Whalers Village (2435 Kā'anapali Parkway, Kā'anapali, HI 96761). Offering keiki physicals, vaccines, wellness, activities, food, and music. HI-CLPPP is offering free lead testing of household items.
- October 30, 9 a.m to 12:30 p.m. – [A Very Hui Halloween](#) presented by Family Hui Hawai'i, Maui Nui Botanical Gardens (150 Kanaloa Avenue, Kahului, HI 96732). Offering child developmental screening, community support services, music, and trick-or-treating. HI-CLPPP is offering free lead testing of household items.

"Lead poisoning is preventable," said Dr. Frescas. "Taking a few simple steps today can make a big difference tomorrow for the health and safety of our keiki and future generations."

To learn more about how to keep your keiki safe from lead exposure and link to lead testing and referral services, visit lead.hawaii.gov.

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