



June 12, 2024

Okemos Public Schools
4406 Okemos Road
Okemos, Michigan 48864

Dear Okemos Public Schools Families,

Over the past year, Ingham County Health Department (ICHHD) has been working collaboratively with Okemos Public Schools (OPS), the schools' contracted environmental testing firm, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) regarding elevated detections of lead in various water sources at OPS district buildings. Our primary goals were to (1) reduce the risk of ingestion of water where lead was detected, and (2) inform families of lead testing resources. The best way to know if a child has been exposed to lead is to have their blood tested. Recently, concerns were shared with us from parents that there was a miscommunication regarding timelines for blood lead testing.

Testing for Lead in the Body

A blood lead test can tell if a person has had recent or ongoing exposures to lead. As [explained by the CDC](#), "lead quickly enters the blood and can harm a child's health. Once a child swallows lead, their blood lead level rises. Once a child's exposure to lead stops, the amount of lead in the blood decreases gradually. The child's body releases some of the lead through urine, sweat, and feces. Lead is also stored in bones. It can take decades for lead stored in the bones to decrease. Many things affect how a child's body handles exposure to lead, including the following: (1) Child's age, (2) Nutritional status, (3) Source of lead exposure, (4) Length of time the child was exposed, and (5) Presence of other underlying health conditions. Lead in blood represents only a portion of the total amount of lead present in the body. However, a blood lead test is the best way to assess a person's exposure to lead."

Timing of Lead Testing

Prior communications were sent to parents stating that "the blood test is accurate only 28 days after exposure to lead." We want to clarify that statement. **Lead in the body will decrease gradually after exposure stops; nevertheless, we recommend that those who have concerns regarding recent or potential ongoing lead exposure,**

receive a blood lead test. This recommendation has not changed. (Please see testing information below).

Type of Lead Testing Recommended

Talk to your healthcare provider about [blood lead testing](#). Both MDHHS and CDC recommend testing blood for lead exposure. Urine testing is not the standard MDHHS recommended method of lead testing, and is not recommended at this time to determine recent or ongoing exposures to lead. If you do not have access to a health care provider, please contact the ICHD Childhood Lead Program at (517) 887-4322. For more information about the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, see [Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program](#).

Symptoms and Effects

Most children with any lead in their blood have no obvious immediate symptoms. Even so, exposure to lead can seriously harm a child's health and cause well-documented adverse effects such as: (1) Damage to the brain and nervous system, (2) Slowed growth and development, (3) Learning and behavior problems, and (4) Hearing and speech problems. Lead exposure in children is often difficult to see. Again, most children have no obvious immediate symptoms. If a child may have been exposed to lead, parents should talk to their child's healthcare provider. They should discuss getting a blood lead test.

Lead Testing Coverage and General Recommendations

Many private insurance policies cover the cost of testing for lead in the blood. The cost of blood lead testing for children enrolled in Medicaid is covered by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

All children who are at risk for lead exposure should be tested for lead poisoning. Some children are more likely to be exposed to lead than others. These include children who (1) Live or spend time in a house or building built before 1978, (2) Are from low-income households, (3) Are immigrants, refugees, or recently adopted from less developed countries, (4) Live or spend time with someone who works with lead, or (5) Live or spend time with someone whose hobbies expose them to lead. ([CDC](#))

Handwashing

Another area of concern for parents has been exposure to lead through water used for handwashing. According to MDHHS, **hand washing is safe, even if the water contains lead. Human skin absorbs little, if any, lead from water.** EPA estimates of the potential ingestion of water on the hands from handwashing to be very small. It is important that children have access to handwashing facilities to prevent transmission of germs on the hands. ([CDC](#)) Soap and water work to remove all types of germs from hands. ([CDC](#))

Talk with your Doctor

We recognize that parents may have concerns regarding lead exposure and their child's health and development. If you have concerns about your child's health or development, talk with your child's healthcare provider. If you don't have a primary care provider, you can contact the Ingham Community Health Centers at 517-887-4305 to get established as a patient.

We understand that learning that your child may have been exposed to lead is concerning, and it is a concern that we take very seriously. We appreciate the opportunity to clarify our recommendations and provide additional information in response to parent concerns. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact ICHD.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "A. Shoyinka".

Adenike Shoyinka, MD, MPH
Medical Health Officer