



# **BERRIEN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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**For Immediate Release**

## **Berrien County Health Department Offers Lead Testing for Children under the Age of 6**

**Benton Harbor, Michigan, Jan. 25, 2024** – Concerned your child may be exposed to lead? The Berrien County Health Department is offering lead testing for all children under the age of 6.

Lead is a metal that can be found in paint dust, paint chips, soil and drinking water. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) said that exposure to lead can harm the brain, nervous system and reproductive system, resulting in a wide range of health and developmental issues, including serious illness and death.

BCHD and CDC recommend testing if children:

- Live in a home built before 1978.
- Receive Medicaid services.
- Are an immigrant, refugee or adoptee from another country.
- Live near a known source of lead, such as a lead smelter or mine.

“Even small amounts of lead can be dangerous to children, especially those younger than 6,” said Dawn Poindexter, BCHD’s emerging threats supervisor. “They may not appear sick, but children who have been exposed to lead may have difficulty paying attention and learning. They may face lifelong health issues, such as hearing and speech problems or developmental delays.

“As part of the state’s new [Get Ahead of Lead](#) campaign, we are offering weekly testing that takes approximately 10 minutes. We strongly encourage parents and guardians to get a test for their child if they are concerned about lead exposure.”

Testing is held weekly at the following BCHD locations:

- Niles office, 1205 N. Front St. – 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Wednesdays

- Benton Harbor office, 2149 East Napier Ave. – 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Thursdays

Appointments are encouraged for testing and can be made by calling 1.800.815.5485 and selecting option 3. BCHD will accept walk-ins.

A trained BCHD professional will do a quick poke of the child's finger to draw a blood sample. Parents and guardians will receive test results immediately. If a child has elevated lead levels, they will be referred to the Health Department's lead case manager, who will provide additional resources and support.

Testing is free for children who receive support through the state's Women, Infants and Children program. Self-pay patients are billed on a sliding scale based on income and household size. For those with insurance, BCHD will bill 100% to insurance. Parents and guardians will be responsible for any cost insurance does not pay.

Community members can pick up a free water filter during their appointment if they are a City of Benton Harbor resident and have:

- A child younger than 19 living in the home and on Medicaid.
- Someone who's pregnant living in the home and on Medicaid.

"The Get Ahead of Lead campaign can help residents find and eliminate lead sources in their home," Poindexter said. "It's important to get your child tested for exposure to lead so we can provide you the resources needed."

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