

Lead paint poses hidden danger

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DOVER — A hidden danger could be on your walls and poisoning your children; still, many citizens are unaware of the devastating effects of lead poisoning from paint.

Jamie Polchies, lead prevention program manager for the Community Action Partnership of Strafford County, is hoping to make more people aware of the hazard posed by lead paint. And, he wants the public to know that his agency can arrange lead eradication with federal grant money to help eligible tenants and homeowners get rid of the danger in their dwellings.

Polchies works to detect elevated lead levels for Community Action Partnership (CAP), a network of social service agencies.

Lead paint has been banned for residential use since 1978. Nevertheless, lead paint still exists in many homes constructed before the change.

Polchies administers a program that helps low-income families and landlords test older homes for signs of lead. CAP works with licensed risk assessors and abatement contractors to test for and remove any harmful substances. Inspections are performed to comply with state regulations, Polchies said.



Courtesy photo Lead paint chips in older homes and apartments can poison your children. Community Action Partnership of Strafford County wants to raise awareness of the problem and is one of the New Hampshire agencies that can arrange lead eradication through federal grant money available to eligible tenants and homeowners.

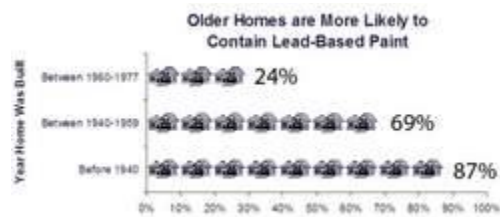


Illustration courtesy of the Environmental Protection Agency This chart shows the likelihood that our home may contain lead paint. Older homes are particularly at risk.

According to the National Institutes of Health, even if contaminated paint is not peeling, when being stripped or sanded it can release poisonous dust in the air. Infants and children with even mild lead poisoning can be left with permanent brain damage. High levels can affect nerves, muscle, kidneys and blood vessels to a degree.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, lead injures the brain and other parts of the nervous system. Some of the health problems caused by lead poisoning may never go away. Children can have their growth and development slowed, hearing and speech damaged, suffer behavioral problems or have cognitive abilities impaired.

Community Action Partnership tries to assist families with infants and children under 6, who are the most prone to the poison. According to CAP, nearly 1 million children living in the U.S. have blood lead levels high enough to impair their ability to think, concentrate, and learn. Also according to CAP, New Hampshire has the oldest housing anywhere in the nation, with 62 percent of its homes built before lead-based paint

was banned in 1978.

“Children are more prone to be poisoned. They're in their own risk category,” Polchies said.

“They (kids) handle everything and the majority of contact is through their mouths. Pacifiers are a big contributor. Air movement in the house too,” Polchies said, adding even cleaning it can spread the contamination.

NIH says children living in pre-1960s housing, which can contain lead paint, carry the highest risk of being exposed to the poison, which can even be found on the toys they play with.

And not only young children will suffer from developing nerve and brain damage. Unborn children are the most vulnerable, according to NIH.

A 2010 blood lead testing report for the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services showed that nearly 1 percent of the 14,793 children younger than 6 who were screened had elevated levels of lead in their blood.

“It's a serious issue and you never see it in the news,” said Mark Jacobson, program specialist for a lead-based paint hazard control program at the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority (NHHFA).



Courtesy photo This child places her hand on the windowsill of her home, but is it safe? Community Action Partnership of Strafford County wants to raise awareness of the problem and is one of the New Hampshire agencies that can arrange lead eradication through federal grant money available to eligible tenants and homeowners.

Jacobson works for a program that rehabilitates single and multifamily homes. He said once the damage is done, it's almost impossible to reverse.

“We want to get in as soon as possible, especially if the children are under 6. We encourage children to get blood tested,” he said.

Symptoms can be subtle, according to lead specialists. They can be confused with a cold or fever, something many people wouldn't ordinarily think twice about.

According to the NHHFA, they were awarded a \$2,480,000 federal grant for the removal of hazardous lead paint from the state's homes and apartments.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development approved award will provide money for lead hazard reduction in at least 200 rental property units and single-family homes, particularly in pre-1978 housing where lead-based paint hazards are much more likely to be found.

Entities such as Community Action Partnership of Strafford County and NHHFA's lead-based paint hazard control program do require income-level eligibility to apply; however inquiries are strongly encouraged.

“I'll tell them who to call and how to help, if I directly cannot. These children are our future,” Polchies said.

For more information, contact Community Action Partnership of Strafford County at 603-516-8143 or email jpolchies@co.strafford.nh.us.