

**Wisconsin Biennial Budget 2021-2023
Requests from COLE (Coalition on Lead Emergency) ***

Whereas no one contests the grim reality that lead poisoning at or above 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter (5µg/dL) of blood can cause permanent cognitive damage, behavioral problems, higher school suspension rates, health issues, and increased incarceration for violent crimes;

Whereas according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), there is no “safe” level of lead;

Whereas the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) stated in their *2014 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin* (p.6) that if lead poisoning in children were completely eliminated, the state would save \$7 billion in costs for medical treatments, special education, and crime and juvenile delinquency;ⁱ

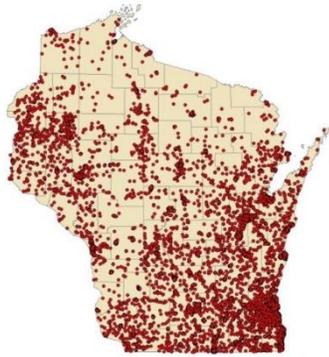


Figure 7. Addresses where children under age 6 were poisoned in Wisconsin, 1996-2016.

Whereas the above report also stated there would be an estimated \$21 billion in new earnings because of increased high school graduation rates and increased lifetime ability to earn;ⁱⁱ

Whereas between 1996 and 2016, lead-poisoned children were found in every Wisconsin county - making this a statewide issue, according to the DHS *2016 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin* (p.12 map and image on the left);ⁱⁱⁱ

Therefore, the Coalition on Lead Emergency (COLE) requests that the following items (1-3) be included in the Wisconsin Biennial Budget for 2021 - 2023:

1) \$20.3 million increase in funding over the biennium for LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS:

- **\$9.5 million to increase testing of Wisconsin children at risk for lead poisoning;**^{iv}
- **\$900,000 to better educate parents about lead hazards and prevention;**
- **\$9.9 million to expand services in the Birth to 3 Program for lead-poisoned children.**

As stated above, *every county in Wisconsin has children with lead poisoning*, as defined by the CDC and state statute WI SS 254.11(9) as a blood lead level at or greater than 5 µg/dL. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) reported 3,923 children under six years of age were lead poisoned in 2018, with a 4.5% average rate of poisoning among those tested across the state. The twelve county and municipal Health Departments reporting above average poisoning rates including up to 9.2 % of the children tested were: **Ashland County, Dodge County, City of Fond du Lac, Grant County, Manitowoc County, the city of Milwaukee, the city of Racine, Rock County, Sheboygan County, the city of Watertown and Waupaca County.**^{v 1}

¹ For the average lead poisoning rate for children 0-6 years of age: the *city of Milwaukee* reports a high poisoning rate of 9.2%, with *Waupaca County* not far behind at 8.5%. *Sheboygan County* shows a poisoning rate of 7.1% among those tested, *Ashland County's* is 6.4%, and *Racine's* is 6.1%. For children under 12 months of age: *Door County* reports a rate of 8.3% lead poisoned among those tested, *Lincoln County* 6.3%, while *Milwaukee's* is

In **Clark, Forest, Green, and Winnebago Counties**, between 4 and 4.4% of the children tested were found poisoned. That is one in every 23-25 children tested. The poisoning of so many children across the state can be either prevented or mitigated by increased statewide funding.

1a) Blood lead testing in 2018 was administered to only 87,839 of the 400,000 children under six years of age in Wisconsin^{vi}. Despite the estimated 35% of children at risk for lead poisoning across the state,^{vii} only about half of those children or 18% of children were tested when one excludes the high level of testing in Milwaukee (53%, which nonetheless does not achieve testing levels mandated by city ordinance.) The rate of testing across the rest of the state includes counties that exceeded the state average of 4.5% lead poisoned; for example, **Waupaca County** tested only 15% of children under six years of age despite 8.5% found lead poisoned. **Sheboygan County** tested only 16%, despite 7.1% found poisoned.^{viii}

Some county health departments with below average rates of poisoning in 2018 tested even fewer children under 6; for example, **Taylor, St. Croix and Lafayette Counties** tested 11% and **Iowa County** tested only 8% of children under 6 in 2018.^{ix}

It appears that within counties that test few children, the percentages found poisoned can fluctuate greatly each year. For example, **Rusk, Vernon and Green Lake** - according to data for 2019 collated so far - show rates of poisoning above the 2018 state average; while the previously named **Waupaca, Grant** and others do not.^x Together, these data highlight the need for more testing across the state, given that half of Wisconsin's lead-poisoned children have not been identified.

Furthermore, according to the DHS website, the CDC recently reported that many Wisconsin children missed recommended blood lead testing during the **COVID-19** pandemic.^{xi} With 19,000 fewer Wisconsin children lead-tested over the entire pandemic year of 2020, we have a lot of catching up to do.^{xii}

In January of 2021, COLE sent a state-wide survey to all 89 Wisconsin local Health Departments in 72 counties regarding their ability to test and respond to lead poisoned children. Amid a pandemic, local Health Departments prioritized lead poisoning and phoned or emailed their responses from 26 counties, or 36% of those queried.

Some Departments reported that physicians and other clinic staff were not consistent in providing lead testing as required by state guidelines. A number stated that they wanted to take a more pro-active approach and conduct lead tests themselves, but they lack the funds to do so. From those responding to our survey, the mean cost of a lead test was \$54. ***Ensuring that all Wisconsin children at risk for lead poisoning are tested at least twice before the age of 3, along with required follow up tests, would mean roughly doubling the current rate of testing. This will require an additional \$9.5 million over two years.***

3.4%. For children between 24-35 months of age: **Sheboygan County** reports 11.1% of those tested as lead poisoned, the **city of Milwaukee** 11.0%, **Waupaca County** 9.0%, **Fond du Lac** 8.4%, and **Iowa County** 8.0%.

1b) Parental Education is a vital part of combating lead poisoning in children. Many departments responding to the aforementioned survey indicated a need for funding educational materials and programs to inform parents about the dangers of lead poisoning, how to reduce lead poisoning in their homes, and the importance of lead testing for children under six years of age. ***The average request per survey respondent was about \$5,050 per year. Providing lead education to Wisconsin's health departments would require at least \$450,000 annually or \$900,000 over the biennium.***

1c) The Birth to 3 Program is a federally-mandated, Early Intervention program to support families of children with developmental delays or disabilities under the age of three. At-risk children with lead poison levels at or above 10 micrograms per deciliter (mcg/dL) are currently eligible for Birth to 3 program services. This request lowers the eligibility level to 5 mcg/dL to allow more lead poisoned children to receive services, and provides the additional funding needed. ***\$9.9 million is needed over the biennium to expand services in the Birth to 3 Program to eligible children who have a positive blood lead test above 5 micrograms per deciliter.***

2) \$23.8 million over the biennium to REDUCE LEAD POISONING BY PAINT—plus \$20 million in matching Federal funds:

- ***\$11.8 additional funding for local health departments to increase lead hazard investigations and issue lead abatement orders for homes endangering children;***
- ***At least \$8 million over the biennium as a state revenue match - to leverage \$20 million annually in federal dollars (CHIP) for the Lead-Safe Homes program to fund remediation of deteriorating lead-based paint hazards and to increase associated workforce development;***
- ***\$4 million over two years plus 1 position in ongoing funding for the Windows Plus Program to fund remediation of friction surfaces that grind lead paint into dust (like windows).***

2a) Lead hazard investigations. Lead paint hazards are the number one source for lead poisoning. Many health departments in counties across the state lack the funds needed to use 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ as the trigger to investigate homes for lead hazards when children are found to be poisoned. For example, **Manitowoc County** reported that *due to limited staff, 20mcg/dL is the criteria used to do home lead investigations, resulting in only 3 of the 52 lead poisoned children having investigations with subsequent abatement orders.*

The **City of Milwaukee** used 20 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ as the actionable level for home lead. In 2019, 115 children in Milwaukee tested at this extreme level. But another 1,745 children tested between 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ and 19 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, for which the MHD could not afford the staff or laboratory facilities for additional home lead investigations.

Likewise, **Fond du Lac, Chippewa and Rusk counties** used 15mcg/dL as the criteria for investigation; **Ashland, Door, and Sheboygan counties** and **City of Racine** used 10mcg/dL.

Fond du Lac County was able to *afford only 3 home lead investigations for approximately 60 children testing \geq 5mcg/dL in 2018.*

Of those county health departments reporting a need for additional funding for lead hazard investigations, the median amount per investigation was reported as \$1500. ***For the 3,923 children tested as lead poisoned in 2018, lead hazard investigations would require a minimum of \$5.9 million annually or \$11.8 million over the biennium.***

2b) Lead-Safe Homes is an exemplary statewide program of the Wisconsin DHS that provides funds to lead-abate owner-occupied and rental properties that house low-income families with vulnerable children and/or pregnant women. Lead paint hazards are the number one source for lead poisoning. Not removing these lead hazards perpetuates a cycle of poisoning - generation after generation - especially for impoverished families whose housing choices are limited. LSHP grantees are currently based in **Ashland, Barron, Green Bay, La Crosse, Prairie du Sac, Milwaukee, and Wisconsin Rapids.**

Importantly, this program includes skilled job training and licensing for abatement contractors, many now in short supply. For example, **Marathon County** has only one licensed abatement contractor; many have none.^{xiii} ***The amount available for such abatement statewide can be substantially increased by \$20 million by providing this revenue match of \$8 million.***

2c) Windows Plus provides lead-safe renovation to high-risk areas in homes built before 1950 that are occupied by low-income families. The Windows Plus Program not only provides increased weatherization with window replacement that conserves fuel costs, but also reduces exposure to older, deteriorating lead painted windows for families who cannot afford such renovation. According to the CDC, peeling lead paint chips are a primary source of lead poisoning for most children.

Windows Plus was initially started as a one-time funded program. It is a prevention program for families with children not identified as lead poisoned, whose home was built before 1950, and have household income less than 301% of the federal poverty level. ***\$4 million in permanent funding will allow the program to complete 100 projects over the next two years.***

3) At least \$40 million over the biennium to REPLACE LEAD SERVICE LINES - to reduce the risk to children and especially to formula-fed newborns and infants.

The EPA estimates that drinking water can provide up to 20 percent of a person's total exposure to lead. However, for newborns who consume mixed formula as their only source of nutrition, lead service lines can be especially harmful. Infants in their primary stage of brain development, receive 40 to 60 percent of their lead exposure from drinking/formula water.^{xiv}

On their website, the CDC identifies lead service lines as a major source for lead contamination and advocates their removal, recommending use of any available programs to assist with their replacement. They warn that many factors can cause the leaching of lead into the home's water supply including water main work, chemical reactions, and the age of the pipes.^{xv}

State municipalities are currently conducting an inventory which mid-way through has already identified more than 175,000 lead and galvanized service lines that may shed lead in towns across the state.^{xvi} Communities from **Ashland to Eau Claire, Little Chute, Manitowoc, Sheboygan, and Wauwatosa** have lead service lines. These municipalities and many others could use state help in removing lines and protecting current and future generations. ***At least \$40 million from the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program is needed as a start to replace lead service lines in Wisconsin over the next two years.***

Summary

Thank you for considering our requests to protect Wisconsin's children: 1) To support local health departments by significantly expanding lead testing for at-risk Wisconsin children, lead education for parents, and Wisconsin's Birth to 3 program; 2) To decrease paint lead poisoning by expanding lead hazard investigations, providing a state revenue match for more federal CHIP funds and workforce development, and increasing funds for the Windows Plus programs; and 3) To remove lead in drinking water by replacing lead service lines.

Sincerely,



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**COLE member organizations include Milwaukee Water Commons, Wisconsin Conservation Voters, Interfaith Earth Network, Hephatha Lutheran Church, Clean Wisconsin, MICAH, Dominican Center, League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County, Community Advocates, Wisconsin Green Muslims, African American Breastfeeding Network, Midwest Environmental Advocates, and MacCanon Brown Homeless Sanctuary.*



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ⁱ 2014 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin. Wisconsin Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, 2014, www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01202-14.pdf, p.6

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ 2016 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin. Wisconsin Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, 2016, www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01202-16.pdf, p.12

^{iv} Wisconsin Public Health Association estimates that as many as 35% of all WI children meet the criteria for lead testing (they are on Medicaid or WIC [qualify if under 133%-185% of the federal poverty level], living in a home built before 1950 (or before 1978 with recent renovations), living in Milwaukee or Racine, or having a sibling with elevated blood lead). The State of Wisconsin criteria for testing children for elevated blood lead are at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/lead/test-your-child.htm>

^v 2018 Blood Lead Testing Data for Children Less Than 6 Years of Age: WISCONSIN 2018 BLOOD LEAD TESTING DATA <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p0/p00817-2018.pdf>

^{vi} *Ibid.*

^{vii} Wisconsin Public Health Association, Op. cit.

^{viii} 2018 Blood Lead Testing Data, op. cit. and Data provided by WI DHS lead advisor, Brian Weaver, regarding 2018 demographics for Wisconsin Counties' children under 5 years of age

^{ix} In 2018, the Milwaukee Health Department recorded 25,928 or 53% of children under 6 years old tested for lead poisoning; 9.2% of those tested were found to be poisoned. But only 1233 children or 16% of the children under 6 were tested in *Sheboygan County*. There the rate of poisoning was found to be 7.1%. These data suggest a child with lead poisoning is more likely to be missed in *Sheboygan County* than in Milwaukee. Examining the data described in endnote "viii" demonstrates the relatively low probability of a child's being tested in Wisconsin outside of a few large cities, even for areas where the percent of children found poisoned exceeds the state average.

^x 2019 preliminary lead testing DHS data shared by Brian Weaver of the WI DHS, lead advisor to Governor Evers - with 2018 population data Mr. Weaver also provided.

^{xi} https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7005a2.htm?s_cid=mm7005a2_w#T1_down

^{xii} Personal communication from Brian Weaver of the WI DHS, lead advisor to Governor Evers

^{xiii} **A major concern for some county health departments was the shortage of qualified abatement contractors.** For example, **Marathon County** has only one lead abatement contractor who bids on jobs where lead poisoned children are housed, resulting in long delays and repeated extensions. State intervention to provide assistance with liability, certification and training costs, plus incentives to take on lead abatement contractor work, would encourage more contractors and help reduce the number of lead poisoned homes.

^{xiv} The EPA estimates that drinking water can provide up to 20 percent or more of a person's total exposure to lead. However, for newborns who consume mixed formula as their only source of nutrition, lead service lines can be especially harmful. Infants in their primary stage of brain development receive 40 to 60 percent of their lead exposure from drinking/formula water as described at the EPA as Basic Information about Lead in Drinking Water. <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/basic-information-about-lead-drinking-water>.

^{xv} CDC, Childhood Lead Prevention Program, Lead in Drinking Water, <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/prevention/sources/water.htm> (last accessed April 1, 2021)

^{xvi} <http://blogs.edf.org/health/2020/04/16/latest-wisconsin-data-on-water-service-lines-provides-important-insights-reveals-over-150000-lead-pipes/>