

New Jersey Office of Local Public Health: Enforcing Laws for Lead Health

An AMCHP MCEH CoIIN Success Story

Lead exposure remains one of the greatest public health issues in the United States due to the detrimental health effects on children, including unborn children. Lead can be detected in pregnant women's plasma and breast milk and can cross the placental barrier. Children are particularly vulnerable to lead exposure due to the susceptibility of their developing organ systems. Children exposed to lead before birth or shortly after are at increased risk of neurodevelopmental challenges including, lower IQ, difficulty concentrating, and inability to control emotions.

In New Jersey, exposure to lead remains a prevalent issue due to several factors, including:

- A large hunting population that is exposed to lead in bullets.
- Old apple orchards with increased lead levels in the soil due to lead arsenate pesticides.
- Housing that contains lead paint.
- Old lead paint factories that increase levels of lead in the environment.
- An increase in people practicing traditional medicines that encourage consumption of minerals and herbs that contain lead.

Ineffective Law & Misconceptions

Addressing health risks from these exposures to lead is challenging because there is a gap in children living in middle-to high-income households receiving lead screening tests that are required by state law. New Jersey state law requires children to receive two lead screening tests: one at 12 months of age and one at 24 months of age. The state has difficulty enforcing this law, and there are several factors impacting low screening rates across the state, including a misconception that lead is an outdated health issue. The New Jersey Office of Local Public Health (NJOLPH) identified an opportunity to raise awareness with local health departments, pediatricians, and families about the importance of this law and to improve protocols to increase testing rates.

To act upon these opportunities, NJOLPH participated in the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) Maternal and Child Environmental Health (MCEH) Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (CoIIN). This initiative aims to build state capacity to increase the number of infants and children who have access to a system of coordinated care to address their needs related to lead exposure, with the goal of decreasing maternal and child morbidity and mortality associated with exposure. Participation in the CoIIN allowed NJOLPH to build partnerships with other states and identify successes and challenges of their program.

Educated & Developed Database

NJOLPH took an innovative approach to address lead screening rates within the CoIIN by focusing on and partnering with health care providers. NJOLPH partnered with the Board of Medical Examiners (BME) and the New Jersey American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) chapter, two health care provider-focused organizations.



With input from these partnerships, NJOLPH developed and distributed laminated fact sheets to local health departments and health care providers on state laws around proper testing for lead, including guidance on both the timing and types of tests. In addition, they made efforts to improve systems and protocols around lead testing to improve efficiency and convenience. These efforts included training on using testing machines that are small and produce data rapidly and developing a new database to allow local health departments to analyze data internally. These approaches were successful in raising awareness about the importance of state laws around lead testing and in improving protocols to increase the efficiency of testing.

NJOLPH faced challenges in their work as part of the CoIIN. As a statewide policy, NJOLPH does not allow local pilot programs, so any new programming must be implemented across the entire state. Distributing the lead screening fact sheets and providing training on the testing machines was difficult to implement on such a large scale. Another challenge NJOLPH faced was changes in administration at the local and state levels. During the project period, the NJOLPH lead program was moved from Family Health Services to the Office of Local Public Health. This move affected the efficiency and communication of the program, slowing down progress of the project.

Future Plans: Continued Partnerships

To continue the successes of this project, NJOLPH plans to continue its partnerships with the New Jersey American Academy of Pediatrics and the other states in the CoIIN. NJOLPH sees this project as a milestone for its lead program and a step forward in addressing childhood lead poisoning prevention.

Meet the Team from New Jersey

The organizations that participated in New Jersey's CoIIN initiative included the New Jersey Office of Local Public Health and Isles, Inc.

Learn More

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and other partners are part of the leadership team for the AMCHP MCEH CoIIN, which is funded through a three-year grant from the United States Health Resources and Services Administration. By joining the collaborative, NEHA has an important platform to affect policy within the participating states. The objective of the CoIIN aligns with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and United States Department of Health and Human Services' broad goal to protect children from the health risks of harmful exposures by developing innovative strategies to reduce and prevent emerging and re-emerging environmental health concerns. Read more at the following websites:

- neha.org
- mchb.hrsa.gov
- amchp.org
- atsdr.cdc.gov
- www.MCHLeadToolkit.org

