Study: 3% of young children have high blood lead levels
by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

High blood lead levels have been found in about 3% of children around the country, according to a new study.

The findings from Quest Diagnostics were released Wednesday, two days after federal authorities announced new measures to reduce lead exposure in public housing.

“These alarming findings show that while our nation has made progress in addressing lead exposure, our public health successes are neither complete nor demographically consistent,” lead author and Quest Diagnostics Senior Medical Director Harvey W. Kaufman, M.D., said in a news release. “We have a long way to go, both in terms of contaminated water and residual lead-based paint, to reduce disparities that put some of our children at disproportionate risk of exposure to lead.”

Lead exposure has been associated with health, learning and behavior problems. While no amount is safe, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), levels at or above 5 micrograms per deciliter are considered high.

Quest's six-year study examined results of venous blood test results from 3.8 million children under age 6 in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. and found these high lead levels in 3.1% of boys and 2.8% of girls, according to the study published in the Journal of Pediatrics.

The highest proportions of high blood lead levels were found in Minnesota (10.3%), Pennsylvania (7.8%), Kentucky (7.1%), Ohio (7%) and Connecticut (6.7%). In six Zip codes located in New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio more than 14% of the tests showed high blood lead levels. The states with the lowest proportion of elevated tests were Florida (1.1%) and California (1.4%).

Elevated blood lead levels were more likely to be found in areas with high proportions of houses built before 1950 and areas with high poverty rates, according to the study. Nationwide, high blood lead levels declined from 3.67% in the first year of the study to 2.59% in the final year.

“This study … shows us that we may have had some successes, yes they were less elevated over the time period they looked at, but lead is still a problem,” said Jennifer A. Lowry, M.D., FAACT, FAAP, chair of the AAP Council on Environmental Health Executive Committee.
Cognition/Language/Learning Disorders, Lead

She stressed the need for pediatricians to be diligent about testing children at risk for lead exposure.

"That's really got to be where we are until we get to a point where all children will not be exposed," Dr. Lowry said.

The Academy will be releasing detailed guidance in an updated policy *Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity* on Monday, June 20.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) also recently announced [steps to protect children from lead](#) though grants to state and local governments and a toolkit aimed at identifying and addressing lead hazards and providing blood tests to children under 6 years old in public housing.

AAP President Benard P. Dreyer, M.D., FAAP, applauded the actions saying they will help "make a difference for some of the most vulnerable children."

"Families living in public and federally-subsidized housing should not have to worry about whether or not their children are breathing in lead paint dust as they play and crawl on the floor, or drinking lead-contaminated water as it flows through aging pipes," Dr. Dreyer said in a statement. "As pediatricians who work every day to ensure children can grow up healthy and thrive, we stand strongly with HUD in its efforts to protect our communities from lead exposure."

**Resources**

- [Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Information for parents on lead in tap water](#)
- [Lead Free Kids](#)
- [Video: "Little things matter, the impact of toxins on the developing brain"](##)