This report details trends in childhood blood lead surveillance data in New York City, and has been updated to include data through the second quarter of 2020 (April through June). The number and rate of children with elevated blood lead levels in New York City are at a historic low and continue to decline. Between 2005 and 2019 we have seen a 92% decrease in the number of children with blood lead levels of 5 mcg/dL or greater among children under 6 years of age and a 92% decrease among children under 18 years of age. This declining trend continued in the second quarter of 2020.

While the decline in lead exposure has been observed in children associated with both public and private housing, children associated with public housing typically have lower rates of elevated blood lead levels than children associated with private housing. Between January and June 2020, the rate of children associated with private housing with elevated blood lead levels was 12.2 per 1,000 children tested, and among children associated with NYCHA housing the rate was 5.2 per 1,000 children tested. Children associated with private housing are more than twice as likely to be exposed to lead in their environment as children associated with NYCHA housing.

The COVID-19 public health emergency has led to significant changes in health care utilization – including a drop in blood lead testing among children. For this reason, 2020 surveillance data should be interpreted with caution.

*2019 & 2020 data are preliminary. The COVID-19 public health emergency has led to significant changes in health care utilization – including a drop in blood lead testing among children. For this reason, 2020 surveillance data should be interpreted with caution.

Note: The data above represents unique children per year. Adding across years will result in duplicate counts of individual children over time. Between January 2010 and June 2020 there were 68,194 children under the age of 18 who had a blood lead level of 5 mcg/dL or greater; 2,158 (3%) of these children were associated with NYCHA.

*The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now uses a reference level of 5 micrograms per deciliter (mcg/dL) to identify children ages 1-5 years who are in the highest 2.5% of children when tested for lead in their blood.
Comparison of each quarter in a given year to the corresponding quarter in each previous year shows a declining trend in the number of children with elevated blood lead levels from 2014 through the first quarter of 2020.

From January to March 2020, there were 924 children under age 18 with blood lead levels of 5 mcg/dL or greater, a 16% reduction compared to 1,105 children during the same time period in 2019.

From April to June 2020, there were 422 children under age 18 with blood lead levels of 5 mcg/dL or greater, a 53% reduction compared to 902 children during the same time period in 2019. This decline is largely due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, which has caused dramatic changes in health care utilization – including a drop in childhood testing for lead exposure.
Exposure to lead presents the greatest risk to children under 6 years of age because they are growing rapidly and because they explore the world with hand-to-mouth activity.

The decline in the number of children under age 6 with elevated blood lead levels continues in the first half of 2020, both among children associated with NYCHA housing and children associated with private housing. From January through June 2020, 1,116 children younger than 6 years old had a blood lead level of 5 mcg/dL or greater; 29 were associated with public housing. This represents a decline of 31% citywide compared to the first half of 2019 when there were 1,615 children under age 6 with blood lead levels of 5 mcg/dL or greater and 47 children associated with NYCHA.

The rate of elevated blood lead levels is more than twice as high for children associated with private housing as for children associated with NYCHA housing. In the first half of 2020, the rate of children with elevated blood lead levels associated with private housing was 11.8 per 1,000 tested and for children associated with public housing the rate was 5.1 per 1,000 tested.
Between 2014 and 2019, there was a declining trend in the number of children exposed to lead across all blood lead level groups. This trend accelerated in the first two quarters of 2020, largely due to changes in health care utilization associated with the COVID-19 public health emergency.
The effect of COVID-19 public health emergency on childhood testing for lead exposure

The COVID-19 public health emergency has led to significant changes in health care utilization – including changes in the number of children receiving blood lead tests. A decline in testing started in mid-March, after a national public health emergency was declared and New York State entered “NY on PAUSE” under the Governor’s Executive Order. The number of children tested in March and April 2020 declined 49% and 88%, respectively, compared to the same period in 2019. Testing rebounded in May and June 2020, particularly for those most at risk, i.e., children under 3 years of age. In this youngest age group, by the end of June 2020, the number tested was only 6% lower than in June 2019. As a result of these trends, it is difficult to compare 2020 surveillance data to similar periods in past years.

Number of children with a blood lead test by week, New York City, January–June 2019 & 2020

- Children under 3 years of age
- Children 3 years of age and older
Concerned about lead poisoning?  
Here’s what you can do:

**Lead poisoning is preventable. Avoid exposure.**  
- Report peeling or damaged paint to your building owner. Building owners are required to safely fix peeling paint. If they do not fix peeling paint, or if work is being done in an unsafe manner (for example, creating dust that is not being contained), you should report them online or by calling 311.  
  - NYCHA residents concerned about their home or their children can call 718-707-7771.  
- Keep children away from peeling paint and home renovations.  
- Wash floors and windowsills often. Wash children’s hands and toys, too.  
- Remove shoes before entering your home.  
- Wash work clothes separately from the family laundry if someone in your household works in construction.  
- Learn more about avoiding products that may contain lead, such as imported pottery, food and cosmetics, and traditional medicines. Visit nyc.gov/health.

**Get tested.**  
- A blood test is the only way to find out if you or your child have an elevated blood lead level.  
- In New York State, children must be tested for lead poisoning at ages 1 and 2, and screened for risk up to age 6.  
- Ask your doctor about testing older children if you think they may have been exposed to lead.  
- Pregnant women should be assessed for lead exposure at their first prenatal visit.  
- Call 311 for help finding a doctor or clinic.

**Data Notes and Definitions**  
- Data in this report were collected during routine childhood lead surveillance by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene between January 2010 and June 2020.  
- Data for 2019 & 2020 are preliminary. Numbers and categorization of children by blood lead level, borough and type of housing can change for a variety of reasons, including address change, misreported addresses and invalid blood tests. The COVID-19 public health emergency has led to significant changes in health care utilization; 2020 surveillance data should be interpreted with caution.  
- Each child is counted only once per year, but the data do not represent unique children if added over multiple years. NYCHA housing is categorized based on the address listed on the laboratory report of the child’s highest blood lead level in a given period. The child’s highest venous test is used first, and if not available, the finger-stick test or unknown test type is used.