



Report to the New York City Council on Progress in Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning in New York City

Submitted by New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
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About This Report

Local Law 1 of 2004 requires the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to annually report to the New York City Council on the progress toward reducing childhood lead poisoning and increasing blood lead testing in New York City. This report is submitted in compliance with this requirement.

Data in the report are presented in three sections:

- *Section I* describes New York City's progress in reducing the number and severity of childhood lead poisoning cases. While DOHMH provides lead poisoning prevention services for all children under 18 years of age, this section focuses on children under 6 years of age¹ since they are at greatest risk for lead poisoning.
- *Section II* presents data on blood lead testing for children turning 3 years of age in 2013. New York State law requires testing of all children at or around age 1 and age 2. Consequently, before turning 3 years of age New York City children should be tested twice.
- *Section III* outlines strategies for continued progress in prevention of childhood lead poisoning.

Important Definitions in This Report

Blood lead level (BLL) is the concentration of lead, measured in micrograms in a deciliter of blood (mcg/dL).

Lead poisoning is defined by the New York City Health Code as a blood lead level of 10 mcg/dL or greater.

Environmental intervention blood lead level (EIBLL) is the term used by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to refer to the blood lead level at which environmental intervention and case coordination services for children with lead poisoning are initiated. The EIBLL is currently 15 mcg/dL.

Reference level is the blood lead level set by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to identify children with elevated blood lead levels. The current CDC reference level is 5 mcg/dL, based on the 97.5 percentile of the 2007-2010 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey's child blood lead level distribution.

¹ In 2006, the New York City Board of Health lowered the applicable age of Local Law 1 of 2004 from under 7 years of age to under 6 years of age. Local Law 1 of 2004 authorized the Board of Health to make a determination whether or not to amend the applicable age.

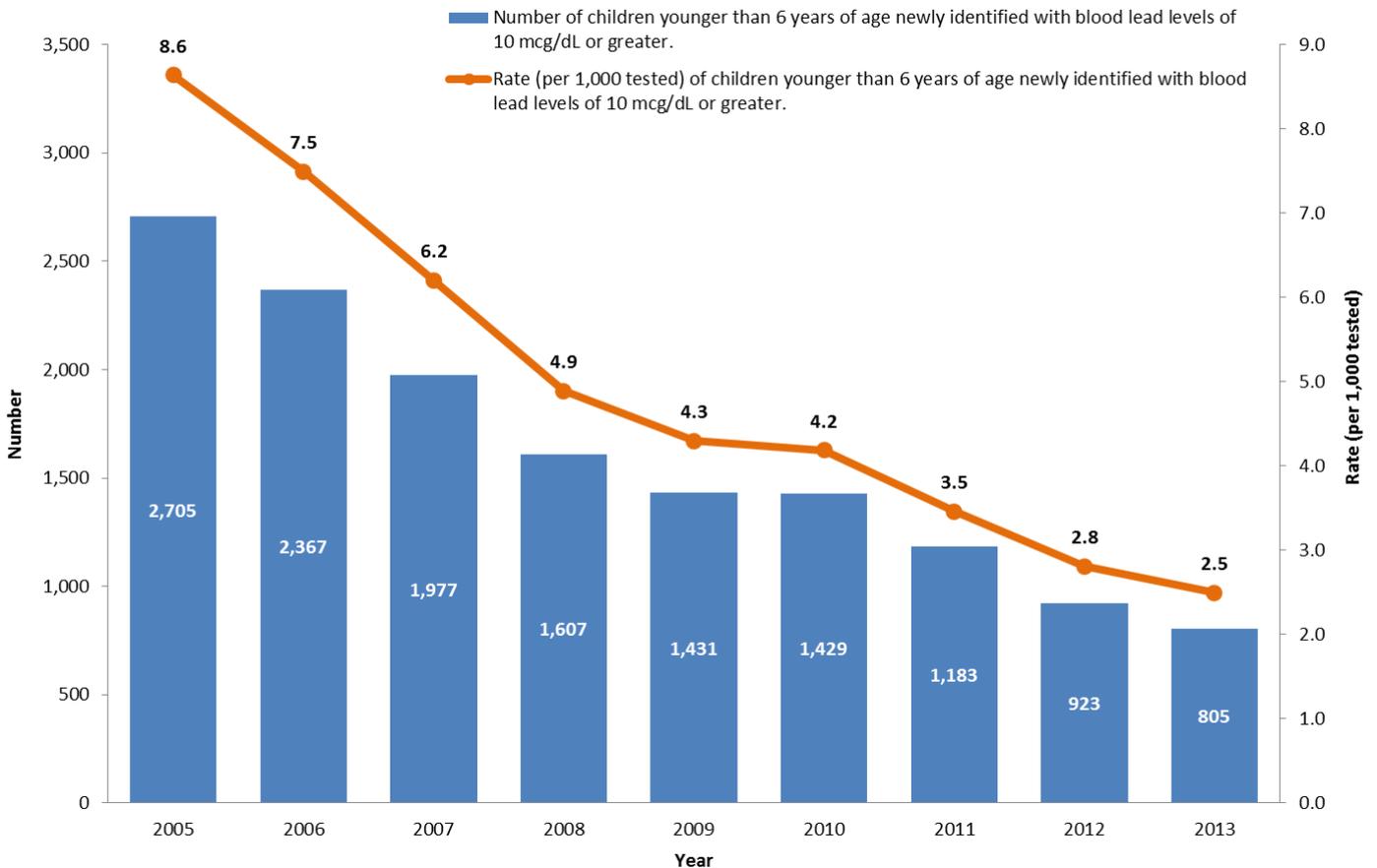
Section I: Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning in New York City

Childhood lead poisoning is a serious but preventable health problem. Over the last few decades, New York City has made significant progress in reducing childhood lead poisoning. There has been a steady decline in the overall number and rate of children with lead poisoning, and there are fewer children requiring environmental intervention for lead poisoning.

Fewer Lead Poisoned Children

- In 2013, 805 New York City children under 6 years of age were newly identified with blood lead levels of 10 mcg/dL or greater, a 13% decline compared to 2012, when the total was 923.
- The rate of the new cases of childhood lead poisoning per 1,000 children tested decreased by 11%, from 2.8 in 2012 to 2.5 in 2013.

Figure 1. Continued Decline in Number of Children with Lead Poisoning



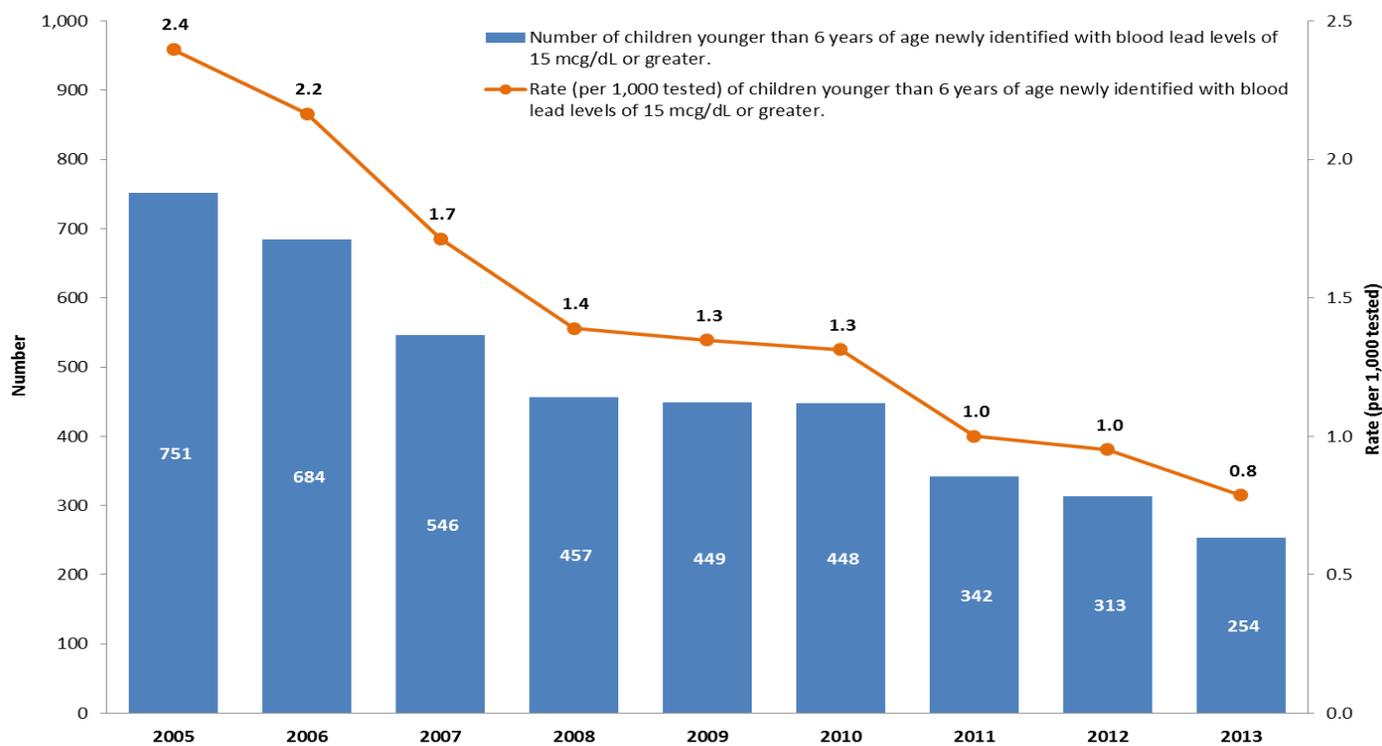
Source: New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Childhood Blood Lead Registry, 2005 - 2013.

Continued Decline in Number of Children Requiring Environmental Intervention

Under the New York City Health Code, the DOHMH provides environmental intervention and case coordination services for New York City children younger than 18 years of age with blood lead levels greater than or equal to the environmental intervention blood lead level (EIBLL). The EIBLL, currently defined as a blood lead level of 15 mcg/dL, triggers the environmental inspection in the child’s home, assessment of potential environmental sources of lead exposure, and coordination with the child’s health care provider.

- In 2013, 285 children younger than 18 years of age were newly identified with blood lead levels of 15 mcg/dL or greater.
 - Of these children, 254 were younger than 6 years of age, the age group at greatest risk. This represents a 19% decline compared to 2012 when there were 313 children younger than 6 years of age newly identified with blood lead levels of 15 mcg/dL or greater.

Figure 2. Fewer Children Required Environmental Interventions



Source: New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Childhood Blood Lead Registry, 2005 - 2013.

Disparities by Race, Ethnicity, and Neighborhood Poverty

While the number of children with blood lead level of 15 mcg/dL has decreased across racial and ethnic groups and neighborhoods, lead poisoning continues to disproportionately affect children of color and children living in poor neighborhoods. In 2013, Hispanic, Black and Asian children represented 83% of children younger than 6 with blood lead levels of 15 mcg/dL or greater, while their proportion in the population of New York City children younger than 6 was 68%. This difference was driven mostly by the disproportionate number of Asian children among children with lead poisoning. In 2013, 22% of children under 6 years of age with lead poisoning were Asian, twice the percentage of Asian children citywide (11%).

Reducing disproportionate vulnerability of children from high poverty neighborhoods remains an important challenge in lead poisoning prevention. In 2013, 60% of children younger than 6 years of age with blood lead levels of 15 mcg/dL or greater were from high poverty neighborhoods (defined as zip codes with 20% or more of the population living below poverty level), yet an estimated 50% of children citywide live in high poverty neighborhoods.

Disparities by neighborhood poverty are present within racial and ethnic groups as well. While 62% of Black children and 64% of Hispanic children citywide lived in high-poverty neighborhoods, 75% of Black children with blood lead levels of 15 mcg/dL or greater, and 78% of Hispanic children with blood lead levels of 15 mcg/dL or greater lived in high-poverty neighborhoods. Similarly, while only 33% of white children citywide lived in high-poverty neighborhoods, 52% of White children with blood lead levels of 15 mcg/dL or greater lived in high poverty neighborhoods. The exceptions are Asian children. Only 20% of Asian children with blood lead levels of 15 mcg/dL or greater lived in high-poverty neighborhoods, below their percentage citywide (29%).

Fewer Children with Blood Lead Levels at or Above the National Reference Level

In 2013, 7,204 New York City children younger than 6 years of age were identified with blood lead levels of 5 mcg/dL or greater, which is the reference level set by U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This represents a 12% decline from 2012 when there were 8,179 children with blood lead levels at or above the CDC reference level. Children with a blood lead level at or above the reference level are exposed to more lead than most children. DOHMH sends letters to families and medical providers of children with blood lead levels of 5-14 mcg/dL. These letters emphasize the importance of timely follow-up testing and suggest actions that parents can take to protect their children from exposure to lead. Educational materials are provided, including a brochure on tenant rights under Local Law 1 of 2004.

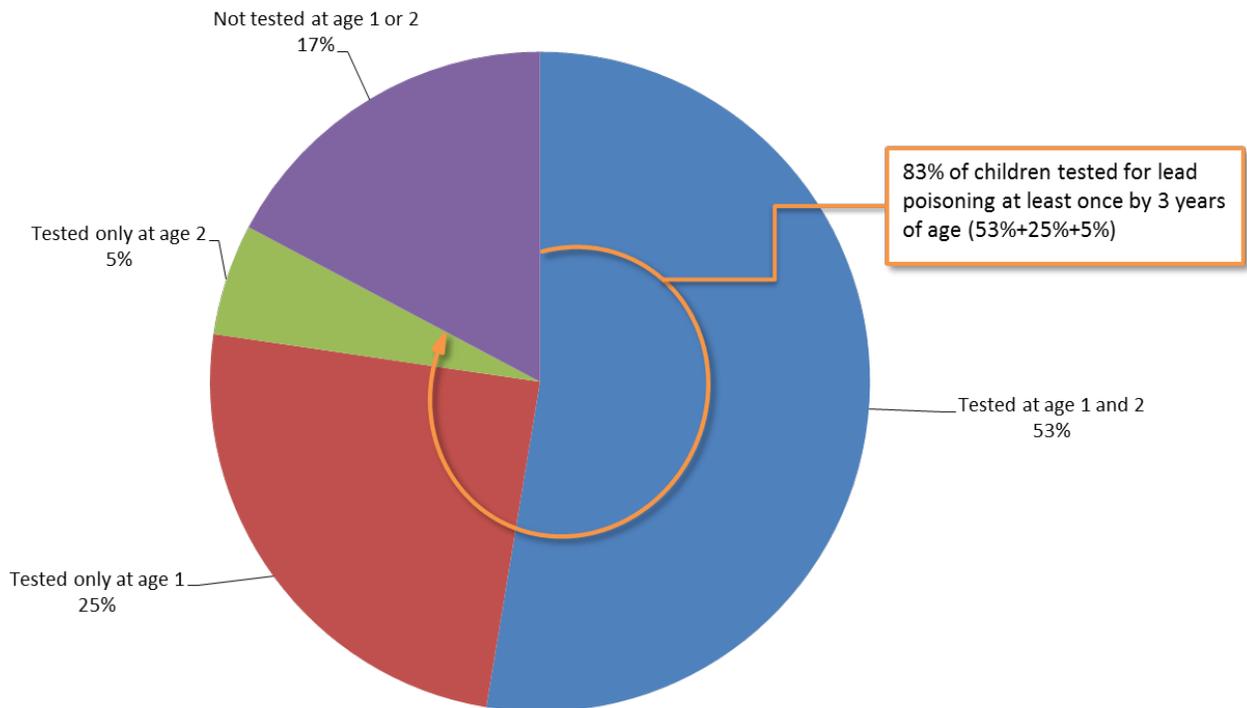
Section II: Blood Lead Testing

Early identification of lead poisoned children is important in order to identify and prevent further exposures as quickly as possible. Since most children with elevated blood lead levels have no symptoms, blood lead testing is the only practical way to identify these children. In New York State, health care providers are required by law to test all children at or around age 1 and age 2 years, and to annually assess children for risk of lead poisoning starting at age 6 months to under 6 years of age.

Most Children Were Tested for Lead Poisoning At Least Once Before Age Three

- In 2013, an estimated 83% of New York City children turning 3 years of age were tested for lead poisoning at least once. Yet, only about half (53%) were tested at or around both age 1 and age 2, as required by New York State law.

Figure 3. Most (83%) New York City Children Were Tested for Lead Poisoning at Least Once Before Age Three



Percentage of children turning 3 years of age in 2013 (Total=114,647) tested for lead poisoning by age at test.
Source: New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Childhood Blood Lead Registry and Office of Vital Statistics.

Section III: Strategies for Continued Progress

New York City has made great progress in reducing childhood lead poisoning. Between 2005 and 2013, the number of children younger than 6 years of age newly identified with blood lead levels of 10 mcg/dL or greater fell by 70%. This success is the result of strong policies and a proactive and comprehensive approach to lead poisoning prevention. Children of color, especially those in low income communities living in older, poorly maintained housing, make up the largest proportion of lead poisoned children. As such, efforts are targeted to those communities. Prevention strategies include:

- Eliminating or reducing lead-based paint hazards and other sources of lead in homes and communities through investigation, enforcement, training, and technical assistance.
- Promoting early identification of lead poisoning through blood lead testing for children, pregnant women, and newborns by outreaching to families, healthcare providers, and Medicaid Managed Care organizations.
- Providing care coordination services to lead poisoned children as well as lead poisoned pregnant women and their newborns.
- Building partnerships with community, social service, and faith-based organizations, home visiting programs, weatherization groups, neighborhood housing groups, medical providers, and agencies concerned with child and environmental health.
- Addressing other healthy homes issues during our lead poisoning prevention efforts, such as reduction of home asthma triggers and safety hazards.