

Tougher N.J. law targets kids' lead paint threat

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Christie signs law lowering amount of toxic metal allowed in kids' blood before a homeowner must take action.



(Photo: Associated Press file photo)

More landlords and other homeowners likely will be forced to remove lead paint from their properties under a law signed by Governor Christie on Monday designed to limit children's exposure to the toxic metal.

The law requires local health boards to determine lead contamination in a home occupied by a child whose blood tests show at least 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter — a standard recommended by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. New Jersey's threshold had been 10 micrograms per deciliter.

"This is a huge step in addressing the lead problem in this state," said Elyse Pivnick, a director at Isles Inc., a Trenton-based community and environmental advocacy group that pushed for stronger lead laws. "More children will be caught at a much lower level and at an earlier age because we know lead accumulates over time in blood."

Exposure to lead has long been a problem in New Jersey, especially in communities with homes built before 1978, when the metal was banned from paint. Long-term exposure and the ingestion of paint dust can cause a host of health problems, including stunting the development and learning capabilities of children.

Much attention has been paid to lead poisoning from drinking water after the crisis in Flint, Mich., where water was found to be heavily contaminated with the metal due to a series of cost-saving moves by public officials. Although parts of New Jersey have high levels of lead in their drinking water, the majority of elevated lead levels in New Jersey children comes from exposure to lead-based paint, Pivnick said.

TRENTON: [Assembly OKs \\$10M for lead cleanup \(/story/news/2016/04/07/nj-assembly-approves-spending-10m-on-lead-cleanup-efforts/94610628/\)](/story/news/2016/04/07/nj-assembly-approves-spending-10m-on-lead-cleanup-efforts/94610628/)

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Children can easily inhale or ingest dust and paint chips whenever lead paint deteriorates or is scraped. The most effective treatment for lead poisoning is stopping exposure, health officials say.

A report last year by Isles showed high levels of lead had been found in 225,000 New Jersey children since 2000. More than 3,000 new cases of children under 6 with elevated levels of toxic lead were reported in 2015, the latest data available.

Children are required to be tested for lead when they turn a year old and again a year later. The results are given to a town's health board if they are elevated. The board dispatches a nurse to visit the family and an inspector to determine the source of lead in the home. The board can order the homeowner to remove the lead or place wood, vinyl, tile, stone, plaster or special coatings to cover the paint.

"What this new lower lead level means is that more children will likely be identified as having lead exposure, prompting parents, doctors, health officials and communities to take action earlier to reduce the child's future exposure to lead," said Assemblyman Troy Singleton, D-Burlington.

The Office of Legislative Services estimates the new law will cost local health boards \$3 million to \$10 million to implement. The state Department of Health provides \$1.5 million to local boards for the program.

Pivnick said she's hopeful the state will provide the funding.

Christie came under fire last year when he vetoed a bill that would have provided \$10 million to a lead-abatement program. Christie and his predecessors had long diverted sales-tax money slated for the Lead Hazard Control Assistance Fund to support other state government programs. Christie eventually restored the funding.

"The governor did the right thing signing this law," Pivnick said. "We know the caseloads are going to go up, so hopefully there will be money to support it."

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