

4 plans for making lead poisoning a priority in NJ

Advocacy groups and supportive lawmakers began a campaign to address lead poisoning in New Jersey children, focusing on restoring \$10 million in funds and having cities proactively inspect homes for lead paint. (Video by Michael Symons)



Michael Symons, @MichaelSymons_ 5:14 p.m. EST February 1, 2016

Pushing again to restore \$10 million in funding, plus have cities perform landlord-funded inspections for lead paint in homes



(Photo: APP)

TRENTON – Eleven cities and two counties in New Jersey had higher percentages of children with elevated lead levels than Flint, Michigan, now the national poster child for lead-exposure, state lawmakers and advocacy groups said Monday.

They launched a four-part plan to boost state funding to combat exposure to toxic lead. The effort would also call on local governments to inspect homes for lead paint, rather than wait for a child to test positive for elevated lead and then figure out why.

Key elements of their effort:

Get the attention of a public startled by Flint. An Asbury Park Press investigation showed how Trenton for years had underfunded programs aimed at fighting lead exposure, which can have severely damaging health effects, particularly on children. But that coverage has been dwarfed by recent national coverage of the lead poisoning caused by the drinking water supply in Flint, Michigan. The officials Monday made plain that the ills are not unrelated.

Trenton-based Isles Inc. released new data (http://isles.org/updates/prevent-childhood-lead-poisoning#.Vq_Nm-Z8cVE) Monday showing 11 New Jersey cities and two counties with higher percentages of children with elevated levels of lead in their blood in 2014 than Flint did in 2015 — Irvington, Trenton, Newark, Paterson, Plainfield, Jersey City, Elizabeth, Atlantic City, New Brunswick and Passaic, plus Cumberland and Salem counties.

Flint changed its water supplier in April 2014 to one using more corrosive water, causing lead levels in children to start spiking higher. The Isles report says 3.3 percent of children under age 6 in Flint tested positive for elevated blood lead levels of at least 5 micrograms per deciliter, the reference level now used by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/acclpp/blood_lead_levels.htm). Thirteen New

Jersey (<http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/documents/childhoodlead2014.pdf>) jurisdictions had higher concentrations than 3.3 percent in 2014, topped by Salem County at 8.9 percent and Irvington at 8.4 percent.

There were more than 3,000 new cases in New Jersey of children under 6 with lead levels meeting the more stringent standard in 2015, bringing the total to around 225,000 since 2000, said Elyse Pivnick, director of environmental health for Isles Inc. New Jersey's exposure is linked to lead paint in older homes, not water supplies.

"Because of Flint, Michigan, most of the world now knows lead in water can poison children," Pivnick said. "The deplorable water scandal is an important story, but it is just as tragic and alarming that thousands of children in New Jersey continue to be exposed to lead year after year."



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Christie kills child lead protection bill

(<http://www.app.com/story/news/investigations/watchdog/2016/01/19/nj-lead-poisoning-christie/78998778/>)

Try again to add the \$10 million to the budget. Legislation has been reintroduced that would add \$10 million in the current budget for the Lead Hazard Control Assistance Fund, which is financed through a 50-cent per gallon fee on paint sales. The fund has spent \$16.5 million since it was created in 2004, but more than \$53 million has been diverted to the general budget.

Additionally, advocacy groups are pushing for Gov. Chris Christie to include the money in the 2017 budget he'll propose in two weeks, or for lawmakers to add it during the deliberations and negotiations that will follow through the end of June. Christie, who has put no money into the fund in the last three years, vetoed a \$10 million appropriation last month.

The Christie administration has never said it opposes the appropriation to the lead-prevention fund, though it hasn't included such funding in recent budgets and generally blocks supplemental spending done outside of the enactment of the state budget each June.



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\$50M taken from NJ child protection lead fund

(<http://www.app.com/story/news/premium/2015/01/02/nj-lead-hazard-fund-depleted/21193095/>)

Move inspections to local level. Sen. Shirley Turner, D-Mercer, said that because the state hasn't followed a 2008 law requiring it to inspect one- and two-family homes for lead paint, she'll push for a law shifting that obligation onto local government instead. It would be paid for through a fee assessed on landlords.

"We know the governor wants smaller government. And of course as you get smaller government, you get fewer services and in this case fewer protections for our people and our children," said Sen. Shirley Turner, D-Mercer.



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(<http://www.app.com/news/politics/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>)

A public advocacy campaign. The #LeadFreeKidsNJ campaign is intending to send painted handprints of 3,100 children, equal to the number who tested positive for lead poisoning last year, to Christie as a way of pressuring him to include the funding.

"Gov. Christie has the opportunity to right this wrong, to include funding for lead poisoning prevention and abatement, to ensure that possibly we would have no kids poisoned by lead," said Ann Vardeman, associate director of organizing and advocacy for New Jersey Citizen Action.

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