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HEALTH ADVISORY

School Water Lead Testing and Blood Lead Level Testing

March 22, 2018 - *Please distribute to all providers in your practice.*

SITUATION

Increased levels of lead have been found in water drawn from schools in Alameda County. Schools and school districts are notifying parents about the potential lead exposures at the school and blood lead level testing. As a result, we expect parents and school staff will be requesting a blood lead test and would like you to order a blood lead test for a suspected exposure to lead.

In 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) established a new “reference value” of 5 micrograms per deciliter (mcg/dL) for blood lead levels (BLLs), thereby lowering the level at which evaluation and intervention are recommended.¹ Depending on your patient’s age and blood lead level, they may be referred for Lead Poisoning Prevention Services, i.e. a combination of health, environmental and residential hazard reduction services, provided by the Alameda County Healthy Homes Department’s Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.

ACTIONS REQUESTED OF CLINICIANS:

1. **ORDER BLOOD LEAD LEVEL TEST** if the patient attends or works at school with an abnormal water lead level test. Use ICD-10 code Z77.011 for “Contact with and (suspected) exposure to lead”. PLEASE NOTE: Lead testing (CPT code 83655) is a covered Medi-Cal service. Alameda Alliance for Health (AAH) members should be sent to a Quest Diagnostics lab to perform the test. Providers at Alameda Health Systems (AHS) can have the test performed at AHS labs. Administrative fees may be received by providers who bill using CPT code 83655-90.
2. **REVIEW MEDICAL, NUTRITION, & MEDICATION HISTORY** and do a physical exam to assess for physical and mental health effects of lead poisoning and for risks for iron deficiency.
3. **TAKE ENVIRONMENTAL and OCCUPATIONAL HISTORIES** to identify other potential sources of lead exposure. For children, use this [Childhood Lead Poisoning Risk Questionnaire](#). ([Spanish](#)) For adults and those who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, use this [Prenatal Lead Risk Questionnaire](#). ([Spanish](#))
4. **PROVIDE EDUCATION** on the potential health impacts of lead in the blood.
5. **REPORT AN ELEVATED BLOOD LEVEL** to Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program using this form, <http://www.achhd.org/documents/Referral-Form-EBLL.pdf>. For questions and assistance, please call 510-567-8280.

BACKGROUND

School water lead testing is being done in accordance with California Health and Safety Code §116277/AB 746, which requires community water systems to test lead levels, by July 1, 2019, from “water fountains and faucets used for drinking or preparing food” at all California public, K-12 school sites that were constructed before January 1, 2010.

In January 2017, the California State Resources Control Boards’ Division of Drinking Water (DDW) issued permit amendments to community public water systems serving K-12 schools requiring them to collect and analyze up to five water samples at each K-12 school that requests sampling.² Once requested, the water system must then sample within 90 days.

¹ Centers for Disease Control (CDC), www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/acclpp/blood_lead_levels.htm, accessed 09/2017. This reference level is to be periodically reevaluated.

² Frequently Asked Questions about Lead Testing of Drinking Water in California Schools:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/documents/leadsamplinginschools/faqs_by_pws_ab_746_v7.pdf

By regulation, school districts/schools must notify parents and guardians when water lead tests results are 15 parts per billion (ppb) or higher. They must also take immediate steps to make the specific fountains/faucets inoperable and investigate to determine if additional fountains/faucets require shut down or if additional tap sampling is required. This regulation is enforced by DDW and California Department of Education and tracked by DDW. Our Public Health Lab does not do water lead or blood lead testing.

As of March 12, 2018, the DDW has received water lead sampling results from 305, out of an [estimated 404](#), schools in Alameda County. Water test results are not listed on their website. Click this link for updates:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/documents/leadsamplinginschools/map_school_lead_results.pdf.

Lead is a naturally occurring metal found deep in the ground. It has been used in a variety of products found in and around our homes and other buildings, including paint and gasoline. Lead-based paint (in pre-1978 homes and other buildings) and lead-contaminated soil are the most common sources of lead poisoning in Alameda County. Other sources include contaminated air and water, among others.

Lead gets into your body in two ways – through breathing it in or by eating/drinking something containing it. Lead exposure can come from a combination of the sources listed above, usually over time.

As you know, lead can affect almost every organ and system in your body. The most sensitive is the central nervous system (brain), particularly in children. Lead also damages kidneys and the reproductive system. The effects are the same whether it is breathed or swallowed.

Because individuals with abnormal levels of lead in their bodies may not have obvious symptoms, a blood lead test is warranted with known sources of potential lead exposure, such as a positive school water lead test, and with risks of lead exposure, as outlined in the Risk Questionnaire above.

RESOURCES

- › “Quick Reference Guide for Elevated Blood Lead Levels”, Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program: <http://www.achhd.org/documents/Quick-Reference-Guide-for-Elevated-Blood-Lead-Levels.pdf>
- › “Health effects from lead exposure”, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR): <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/csem.asp?csem=34&po=10>
- › “Standard of Care on Screening for Childhood Lead Poisoning”, California Department of Public Health (CDPH): https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDC/DEOD/CLPPB/Pages/screen_regs.aspx
- › Management Guidelines, Anticipatory Guidance and Standards of Care for Childhood Lead Poisoning for Health Care Providers from CDPH: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDC/DEOD/CLPPB/Pages/prov.aspx>
- › “Medical Management of Lead-Exposed Adults”, California Department of Public Health: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDC/DEOD/OHB/OLPPP/Pages/medguidelines.aspx>
- › Lead Poison Prevention Webpage, Alameda County Public Health Department: <http://www.acphd.org/lead-poison-prevention.aspx>
- › Alameda County Healthy Homes Department’s Lead Poisoning Prevention Program: <http://www.achhd.org/leadpoisoning/leadp.htm>

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Health Alert: Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.