

# LEAD-BASED PAINT HAZARDS

## **Introduction**

Young children are at the highest risk for ingesting lead from their environment, primarily because they put things into their mouths. This hand-to-mouth behavior is common among children ages 9 to 72 months. If there is lead in their environment, putting toys and other things in their mouths increases the chance of getting lead into their body. Since a child's brain is developing until about the age of two years, lead poisoning is especially harmful during this time.

Lead is a toxin and at low levels can result in learning disabilities and lower IQ. When children have very high levels of lead in their blood (>70 micrograms per deciliter), they can get encephalopathy, an inflammation of the brain that can result in seizures, coma and even death.

The most common source of lead poisoning for children in the United States is lead from house paint. As lead paint ages, it can deteriorate and mix with dust in the home. On the outside of the home, lead paint can deteriorate, fall to the ground and mix with soil near the house. Lead can be found in paint in housing built prior to 1978.

## **Not Widespread Problem in Sarasota County**

Sarasota County has not had a history of lead-based paint hazards nor does there appear to be a widespread problem, according to the Sarasota County Health Department.

The Health Department tests all clients up to age six for lead exposure. Children over age six are tested only if they are high risk. Private physicians occasionally test for lead exposure and refer clients to the Health Department.

The Health Department tests for lead-based paint in residences and businesses using a chemical test kit. Staff follows up on any report of blood lead levels in children over 10 micrograms per deciliter (mg/dcl). Blood lead levels as low as 10 mg/dcl or more are associated with harmful effects on children's learning and behavior. The Health Department randomly tests facilities that serve children for lead-based paint. No childcare centers have been found with exposed lead paint.

On February 9, 2011, officials at the Health Department reported that over the last five years, there have only been 19 cases of lead based paint poisoning in Sarasota County or 5 per 100,000 residents. Eleven of these cases were male, while eight were female. 74% of reported cases white, 16% were African American, and 11% were unknown. Of these cases, 69% were in children ages 0-4. Ten percent of the cases were adults.

## Methodology

In October of 2002, a study was released called “The Prevalence of Lead-Based Paint Hazards in U.S. Housing” and was published in Environmental Health Perspectives. According to this study, houses built up to 1998 all have some level of lead hazards. However, the level of risk increases with the age of the house. According to the research:

- 68% of houses built prior to 1940 pose a hazard;
- 43% of homes built from 1940 through 1959 pose a hazard;
- 8% of homes built from 1960 through 1977 pose a hazard;
- 3% of homes built from 1978 to 1998 pose a hazard.

According to the Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing Sarasota County has:

- 3,604 homes built prior to 1940;
- 18,572 homes built between 1940 and 1959;
- 76,844 homes built between 1960 and 1979;
- 78,583 homes built between 1980 and 1998

Using the methodology and being somewhat conservative since it was necessary to lump 1978 and 1979 in a higher hazard bracket:

- There are 2,450 homes built prior to 1940 with a lead-based paint hazard;
- There are 7,986 homes built from 1940 through 1959 with a lead-based paint hazard;
- There are 6,147 homes built from 1960 to 1979 with a lead-based paint hazard;
- There are 2,357 homes built from 1980 to 1998 with a lead-based paint hazard;
- Of the projected occupied housing units in 2005, there are a total of 18,940 homes with lead-based paint, approximately 12%.

According to Shimberg, approximately 35% of all households are occupied by low-income residents. Based on this:

- An estimated 6,629 homes with a lead-based paint hazard are occupied by low income residents;

Lead-based paint hazard reduction will be integrated into all housing policies and programs in Sarasota County. The Sarasota Consortium is taking a number of measures to evaluate and reduce lead-based paint hazards. They include:

- Low-income homeowners who discover lead-based paint in their homes will qualify for a grant to remedy the risks posed by the lead.
- Individuals taking part in the Down Payment Assistance Program receive a copy of

*Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home.*

- Units rehabilitated using Federal funds will be required to abide by new HUD lead-based paint regulations.