Healthy children are better prepared to transition into successful adults. However, Ohio children exposed to lead face serious health challenges. Research shows that lead poisoning affects children’s development, cognitive abilities, and impulse control. Lead-contaminated paint or dust are the primary culprits in childhood lead poisoning and children can also be exposed through contaminated water, air, or soil. Lead poisoning in children has significant effects on child health and development, including heart and kidney problems, cognitive delays, antisocial behavior, and lower IQs, with lasting effects that continue into adulthood.

Tests of children in Cleveland, Ohio show that they have higher rates of lead poisoning than children in Flint, Michigan, yet many at-risk Ohio children are not tested. The Ohio Department of Health estimates that 3.7 million Ohio housing units contain lead-based paint, a primary source of lead poisoning in children. Children living in houses built before 1978 are at high risk of lead poisoning, meaning that about 42% of all housing units in Ohio likely contain lead hazards.

Though the risks are high, more can be done to mitigate risks to children. Cleveland’s The Plain Dealer found that only one-third of the Cleveland children at risk for lead poisoning were tested in 2015. No level of lead in children’s blood is considered safe, but levels higher than 5 micrograms legally require the Ohio Department of Health to investigate the source of the lead and remove the hazard. In fact, the Cleveland children who were tested had lead poisoning at more than twice the rate of the children tested in Flint, Michigan at the height of its lead poisoning crisis.

Lead exposure is a significant health issue for Ohio’s rural children. Researchers assess the relative risk of lead exposure by mapping poverty levels and the age of houses in census tracts around the country. While lead poisoning is often discussed in connection with urban areas, a majority of census tracts in rural areas have relatively higher risks of lead exposure than the rest of the United States. A number of rural Ohio counties have particularly high risks of lead exposure, including Scioto, Noble, Meigs, and Wyandot.

### Lead Poisoning Can Cause:
- Damage to the brain and nervous system.
- Slowed growth and development.
- Speech and hearing problems.
- Learning disabilities (e.g., reduced IQ, ADHD).
- Behavioral problems (e.g., juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior).
- Preterm birth for pregnant moms.

### Lead Exposure Risk by County Using Poverty and Housing Data, 2013–2017

### What Are the Sources?
The primary source of lead exposure among children is deteriorated lead-based paint (dust).

ODH estimates 3.7 million Ohio households contain lead-based paint, which is the primary source of lead poisoning. In addition, houses built before 1978 are at high risk of causing lead poisoning in children. This means that 42% of all housing units in Ohio likely contain lead hazards.

Children can also be exposed in utero through their mother’s blood supply.

Other sources include soil, water & consumer products.

### How Many Are Affected?
In 2016, 3% of the 0-5 year olds tested in Ohio had confirmed blood lead levels of 5 µg/dL (micrograms per deciliter) or greater.

However, fewer than 40% of our most at-risk kids were tested. (Those living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.)

Also, children on Medicaid are at higher risk for lead poisoning, meaning:

- More than half of Ohio children are at high risk of lead poisoning.
**Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition**

The Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition is a public-private partnership comprised of approximately 200 members committed to advancing comprehensive, sustainable, and preventive solutions to lead poisoning in Cleveland. Components of this long-term, lead safe solution include lead exposure prevention, screening, treatment and intervention, and education and outreach. As a part of their immediate action plan, the coalition is working to propose legislative recommendations, create a Cleveland Lead Safe Home Fund, host a Lead Safe Homes Summit, and advocate for resources at the state and federal levels.

**Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development Investigation & Abatement Efforts**

The Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development (COAD) has been involved in efforts to mitigate the dangers of lead, particularly concerning lead-based paint since 1992. COAD has worked with the Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Office of Community Development and others to provide affordable training to those in Appalachian Ohio who deal with lead-based paint in housing rehabilitation and weatherization programs. COAD professionals have worked with early childcare professionals to help them identify potential lead hazards for children in their networks, provided training to health departments, as well as to Parent Teacher Associations and other child-oriented organizations.

Children tested in Cleveland had a higher rate of lead poisoning than children tested in Flint, Michigan during the height of its lead poisoning crisis.

– The Plain Dealer, Cleveland

**HOW CAN OHIO RESPOND?**

- **Deepen investments in lead abatement efforts, especially in high-risk dwellings.**
- **Ensure all children who are at-risk of lead poisoning are tested each year, especially those identified in high-risk communities.**
- **Increase investments in early intervention services to provide kids who have tested positive for lead poisoning with additional support for healthy physical, mental, and social emotional development that better prepares them for kindergarten.**