
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week

GRAND RAPIDS – One zip code in Grand Rapids led the state for the highest number of lead-poisoned children last year, according to the Michigan Department of Community Health: 49507 (south of Franklin, east of US-131, north of 28th Street). Four out of five homes in Grand Rapids and 59% of homes in Kent County were built before 1978, the year lead was banned from paint. To increase awareness of childhood lead poisoning prevention, the Kent County Health Department (KCHD), along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, is participating in National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week (NLPPW) October 19-25.

Lead exposure is usually from lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust in older buildings, but it can also come from contaminated drinking water, lead in soil, and even lead in the workplace that is accidentally transferred. Early intervention is critical. Lead poisoning can cause permanent, irreversible damage to many organs, including the heart, brain, and liver. It's also linked to lower IQs, hyperactivity, and aggressive behavior.

The CDC estimates that nearly half a million children in the US have elevated blood lead levels (a blood lead level of 5 micrograms per deciliter or higher). The number of children in Kent County with lead poisoning in 2012 was one and a half times the national rate. "Last year in Kent County, a total of 551 children had elevated blood lead levels, high enough to cause learning difficulties and neurological damage" said Joan Dyer Zyskowski, supervisor of the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program of the Kent County Health Department. "Lead poisoning is preventable; fortunately, there are many organizations and individuals dedicated to stopping lead poisoning."

KCHD works closely with the City of Grand Rapids, the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, and the Rental Property Owners Association to respond to very high childhood lead poisoning levels in specific neighborhoods in Grand Rapids. The *Get the Lead Out!* program has fixed lead issues in more than 1,350 homes in Grand Rapids over the past 10 years.

Homeowners and landlords can apply for special funding to safely remove childhood lead poisoning hazards from eligible homes in Grand Rapids. Applications should be received by the City of Grand Rapids Housing Rehabilitation Program by December 1, 2014. Go to <http://gettheleadoutgr.org/> for more information, or call 616.456.3030. If you speak Spanish, call 616.632.7087.

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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