



For Immediate Release

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## National and Local Experts Urge Lead Poisoning Testing For Children

*50% of children in Grand Rapids are not being tested for lead poisoning at the critical ages of 1 and 2*

GRAND RAPIDS – The Grand Rapids Get The Lead Out! campaign has been successful on many fronts. The number of homes having lead based paint abated is increasing. Yet an alarming number of children are not being tested for lead poisoning at the critical ages of 1 and 2.

“In children, lead can cause nervous system and kidney damage, learning disabilities, speech, language problems, decreased muscle and bone growth and hearing damage” said Joan Dyer-Zykowski, Kent County Health Department Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program Manager. “The majority of children lead poisoned in Grand Rapids are between one and two years old.

The Get the Lead Out! campaign is joining the Centers for Disease Control, the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH), and the American Academy of Pediatrics in recommending that parents, physicians and health professionals request and conduct blood lead testing at well child check-ups for all one and two year-old children who reside in the city of Grand Rapids. Health insurance pays for the procedure and testing is the only proven way to detect the exposure that leads to brain damage and other negative health outcomes.

Childhood lead poisoning still affects hundreds of children in the City of Grand Rapids each year. According to MDCH, 103 children were lead poisoned in the city of Grand Rapids in 2008. 73 of those children were one and two years of age.

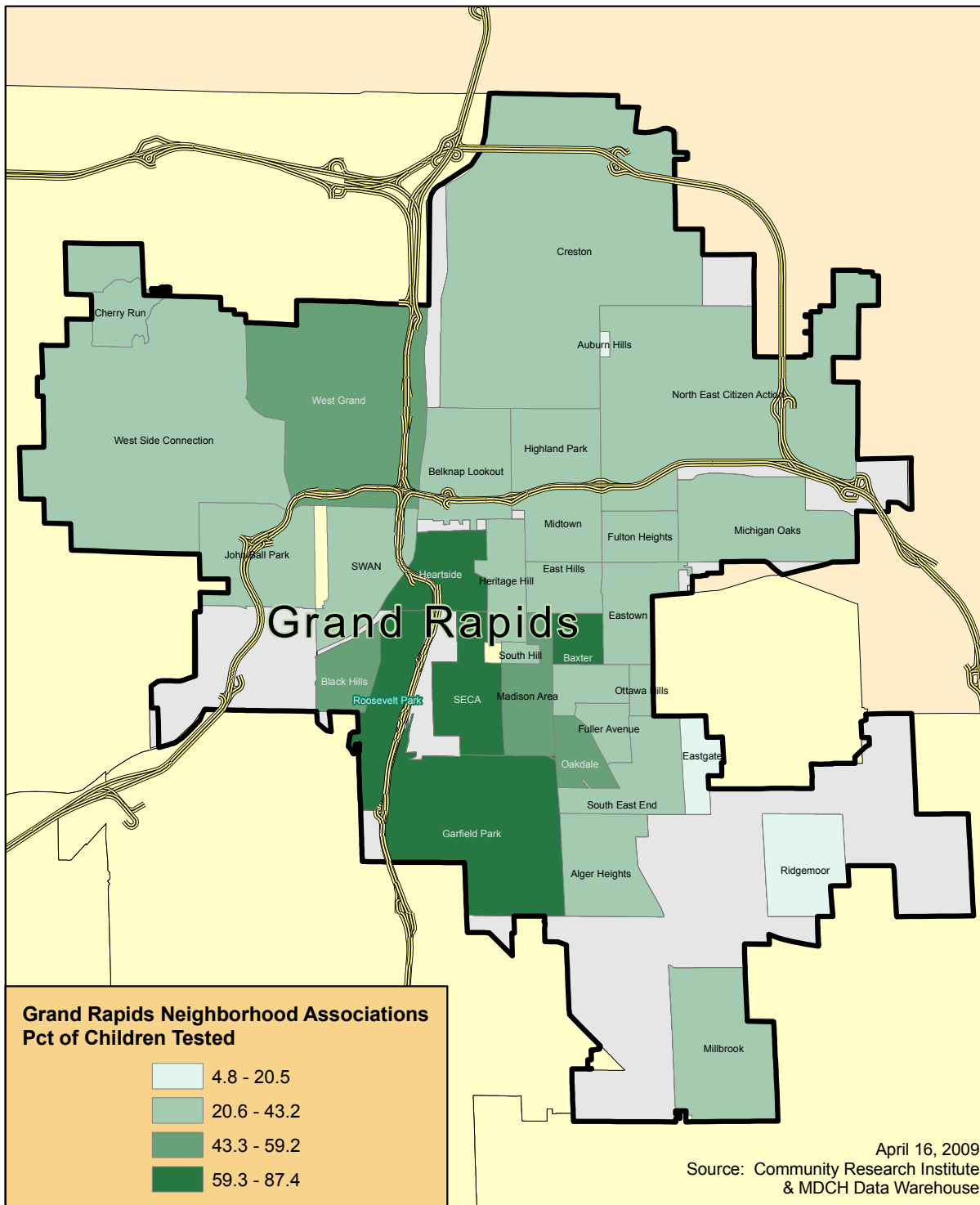
“The fact that we know that only half of our children are being tested means the number of children with lead in their bodies is much greater than the number reported.” said Paul Haan, Executive Director for the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan. “The data shows that in some neighborhoods, the number children being tested for lead is barely reaching 20%. Anything less than 100% is an unacceptable number. We need to get the lead out of the homes and out of our children.”

Lead poisoning rates have dropped more than 75% since the Get the Lead Out! campaign began tracking data in 2001. Unsafe home remodeling activity that spreads lead dust is responsible for a growing portion of the children being poisoned. The City of Grand Rapids has monies available to eradicate lead in homes. Homeowners and landlords can learn more by visiting [GetTheLeadOut.org](http://GetTheLeadOut.org).



Children One & Two Years of Age, Tested for Lead Poisoning in CY 2009  
by neighborhood association boundaries

 **Get the Lead Out!**



# TESTING FOR LEAD IN CHILDREN FACT SHEET

 Get the Lead Out!

**Why get tested?** Childhood lead poisoning causes permanent brain damage. And childhood lead poisoning does not cause spots or other easily visible symptoms. By the time symptoms come, the damage is done. The only way to know is to get tested!

**Who should get tested?** Children should be tested at one year of age and again at two years of age. Additional tests may be warranted until age six, depending upon circumstances. The Centers for Disease Control and the Michigan Department of Community Health require testing for all children who meet any one of the following criteria

- All children who live in designated **high-risk communities** (the cities of Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and others). *The age and condition of the house do not matter, nor does family income!*
- All children on **Medicaid** or in the **WIC** program.
- Children who meet any one of the following conditions:
  - The child lives in or often visits a house, daycare, preschool, home of a relative, etc., built before 1950.
  - The child lives in or often visits a house built before 1978 that has been remodeled within the last year.
  - The child has a brother, sister or playmate with lead poisoning.
  - The child lives with an adult whose job or hobby involves lead.
  - The child's family uses home remedies or cultural practices that may contain lead.
  - The child is a foreign adoptee, refugee, migrant, immigrant, or foster care child.

**What should I expect?** There are two different procedures for testing your child for lead. Both are blood lead tests, the *only* reliable way to know if a child has been exposed. Most of the time a *capillary* test is used, which consists of a simple finger, toe or heel prick to collect a few drops of blood. This is the process used by some pediatricians and family doctors, and most WIC and public health departments. Medicaid will pay for the capillary draw.

Some providers and some insurance companies will require a *venous* draw, which means blood drawn from a vein, usually in the arm. This will require a second appointment at a lab. This process is required by some pediatricians and family doctors, as well as certain insurance plans (not Medicaid).

**Who pays for the test?** All insurance companies and Medicaid will pay for the test. Private insurance may require co-pay. Many public health departments will offer the test at low or no cost to those eligible and at-risk. Call to find out!



**Where should I get my child tested?** It is always best to get your healthcare from your child’s primary health care provider—their pediatrician or family doctor. Get it when you bring your child in for a well child check. Public health departments and many “free clinics” offer the testing for children that do not have a primary care provider. If you participate in WIC, Kent County WIC programs conduct the testing. Here is contact information for public health departments in Michigan’s high-risk communities in west Michigan that can help you get your child tested.

- **Berrien** County Health Dept., various locations, call (269) 926-7121
- **Calhoun** County Public Health Dept., 190 E. Michigan Avenue, Suite A100, (269) 969-6363
- **Kalamazoo** County Health Dept., 3299 Gull Road, Kalamazoo, (269) 373-5116
- **Kent** County Health Dept., 700 Fuller Ave NE, Grand Rapids, (616) 632-7063
- Public Health **Muskegon** County, 209 East Apple Ave, Muskegon, (231) 724-1209

**Who else should get tested?** Children who are older than two but less than six who have not been tested in the past should be tested if they previously or currently met the criteria on the other side of this page. Also, children should be re-tested until six years of age if any of their risk factors change—for example, if they move from one older house to another. When in doubt, ask your doctor for a test for your child!

For more information, contact us  
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