



Instant diagnosis + early intervention = healthier kids

## Get the Word Out to Get the Lead Out

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On a Friday afternoon in July 2007, a routine Women, Infant, and Child (WIC) certification physical exam at the Meriden Health Department for a 3 year-old boy wound up being a lifesaver for his younger brother. After her three-year-old had his physical, which included a routine lead test, the mother asked if the younger child (who was 16 months old at the time) could get tested for lead as well. Her family had been temporarily living with relatives in a home that was well over 75 years old, and casually mentioned to clinic staff that she had recently caught the young child chewing on a window sill on several different occasions. Staff was happy to give the toddler a lead test with their LeadCare analyzer/blood lead testing system.

That request potentially saved the toddler from a lifetime of health issues caused by lead poisoning. The results of the finger-stick test read "high" on the machine, and the mother was told to bring the child to the local hospital for a venipuncture blood test to confirm the result. The follow-up confirmation test revealed that the child's lead level was 70 µg/dL, and treatment was started immediately. Ideally, no lead should be found in the body; action is taken when test results are over 10 µg/dL.

This story is a prime example of why regular testing for childhood lead poisoning every six months until the age of two and then every year after that until age six is so important. Lead in a child's body can result in damage to the brain and nervous system, cause behavior and learning disabilities, slowed growth, headaches, and hearing problems. Because a person cannot see, taste, or smell lead, many parents do not realize they have a lead problem in their home until their children become ill. The only way to find out if a child is lead poisoned is with a blood test.

The toddler was very fortunate that the high level of lead was caught early and treatment was administered right away. Health department staff worked quickly to make sure that the family sought out follow-up tests and treatment. Environmental Health and Clinic staff continue to follow up with the family to ensure that the toddler's lead levels are brought down to a normal level and will further educate the family on how to reduce future exposures. Environmental Health staff will also inspect the family's new residence for potential lead hazards. True "shoe-leather" public health at work!

**Editor's Note:** The LeadCare system was provided to Meriden Health Department as part of a Public Health Foundation project. The Meriden Health Department has continued to screen after the conclusion of the 1-year pilot project.

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