



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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Contact: Lindsay Hodges (DOH), 850-245-4111  
Christine Osterlund (AHCA), 850-922-5871

## **GOVERNOR PROCLAIMS OCTOBER 19-25, 2003, CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING PREVENTION WEEK**

*Health and Medicaid officials work to increase awareness of lead hazards and encourage families living in older homes to have their young children screened*

Tallahassee—Recognizing that childhood lead poisoning remains a leading, but preventable, health hazard to children, Governor Jeb Bush proclaimed October 19-25, 2003, as Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Week. The observance supports efforts aimed at eliminating childhood lead poisoning by 2010, a goal outlined in Healthy People 2010 – a comprehensive nationwide disease prevention agenda created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Florida Department of Health's (DOH) Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, and the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) are committed to the elimination of elevated blood lead levels in Florida's children. The agencies are increasing awareness and ensuring that at-risk children are screened.

"Medical findings have revealed that children are at a particular risk for lead exposure due to hand-to-mouth contamination from playing in household dust or exterior soil that contains lead," said DOH Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A. "All children aged 6 years and younger can be at-risk, especially those between 9 months to 2 ½ years of age."

AHCA Secretary Rhonda Medows, M.D., added: "We have the responsibility to protect our children from suffering the long-term consequences of exposure to lead. These preventable consequences include learning disabilities, anemia, hearing loss, and behavioral problems."

Lead based paint hazards in older homes remain the primary exposure to lead for children. In 1999, the U.S. General Accounting Office reported that elevated blood lead levels remain a significant problem for children served by federal health care programs, including Medicaid. Other groups are at risk as well. Children whose parents are exposed to lead at work or while engaged in a hobby, may inadvertently expose their children to lead. Children moving to the U.S. from other countries may arrive with lead poisoning and require follow-up care.

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## **Childhood Lead Poisoning**

### **Page 2**

In 2002, Florida's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program recorded that 74,982 children, under the age of six, were screened for lead poisoning. Of these, 738 children had an "elevated" lead test result. Overall, the number of lead-poisoned children is declining in Florida and nationwide; however, based on data collected by the program, not all at-risk children have been screened. This may indicate an underestimation of the number of lead poisoned children in Florida.

Parents can do many simple things to prevent lead poisoning. These include:

- Providing healthy snacks between meals—children with empty stomachs absorb more lead than children with food in their stomachs;
- Making sure children wash their hands after playing with toys and before eating or sleeping—this helps remove lead dust;
- Cleaning toys and areas such as baseboards and windowsills, where lead dust may build up, at least once a week with a damp cloth, will help keep dust to a minimum; and
- Encouraging children to play in mulched or grassy areas instead of dirt will help prevent exposure to lead in soil.

A simple blood test is the only way to know if a child has lead in his or her blood. DOH's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program has released statewide screening guidelines to ensure that at-risk children are screened. If parents think their child might have lead poisoning, they can ask their doctor or a county health department to test the child. Medicaid requires blood lead testing at one and two years of age and between the ages of three and six years, if never tested. Parents with children on Medicaid should ask their child's doctor if a test has been done.

For more information on lead poisoning, call your local county health department or the Florida Department of Health, Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at 1-850-245-4444, extension 2869.

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