

# DELIVER TO THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**Background:** During the Flint Water Crisis, reports showed that lead levels were high all across Michigan, not only in Flint. The following document contains excerpts from a *Detroit News* report from 2016 which indicates the spreading of the problem. Something like this may have assisted the Secretary of Health and Human Services make decisions on what to do to stop the crisis from continuing.

## Kids' lead levels high in many Michigan cities

Across Michigan, in cities large and small, lead poisoning continues to plague children, limiting them in school and on the playground.

While much of the state's focus on lead has rightly been on poisoned water in Flint, the metal continues to turn up annually in the bodies of thousands of children across the state, at percentages well above the numbers that raised red flags in Flint.

Elevated blood-lead levels are seen in a higher percentage of children in parts of Grand Rapids, Jackson, Detroit, Saginaw, Muskegon, Holland and several other cities, proof that the scourge of lead has not been eradicated despite decades of public health campaigns and hundreds of millions of dollars spent to find and eliminate it.

"This is still an issue. It's not going away," said Dr. Eden Wells, chief medical executive of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Many in the state were shocked earlier this year by the findings in Flint: After a steady decline in lead levels, they began to rise in 2014 after the city switched its water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River. That change in water supply, experts say, triggered the

increase in lead poisoning because the more corrosive river water may have stripped lead from older pipes and bled it into the drinking supply.

That uptick in Flint, noted by researchers, is what finally forced state officials to confront the dangers in the city's water. Five percent of the Flint children tested had elevated levels of lead, though certain parts of the city had much higher percentages.

Now consider lead exposure rates in some other parts of Michigan:

- In Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park, 10 ZIP codes saw more than 10 percent of children tested have a positive test in 2014. That was nearly 1,000 of the 7,263 children tested, or 13.5 percent.

- In Grand Rapids, nearly 1 in 10 children of those tested in four ZIP codes tested positive in 2014.

- And in Adrian in south-central Michigan, more than 12 percent of the 640 children tested showed elevated levels of lead.

"We do have areas in our state and areas in our country where children are at risk," Wells said.

### **In Flint, crisis pushed rise**

Flint's unfolding water crisis once again brought to the fore a danger long known to rob children of cognitive and physiological function and impulse control. High levels of lead found in students in the Detroit Public Schools system have been linked to that city's notoriously low test scores.

In the 48206 ZIP code on the west side of Detroit, 20.8 percent of the 701 children tested had elevated levels in 2013, and 20.3 percent in 2014, the most recent year tested.

In much of the state where lead is a problem, the source of poisoning has been the traditional culprits: old lead paint on homes built before 1978 and lead residue in dust and soil. Young children are particularly susceptible because of their proximity — on the ground

— to the most common sources of lead. They crawl on their hands, pick up dust and dirt and put their hands in their mouths.

Because of the well-documented dangers of lead, pediatricians are constantly testing children. “And every week there are more kids on” a weekly statewide report on elevated lead levels, said Paul Haan of the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, which works to eliminate household dangers to make children safer and healthier. Parts of Grand Rapids have some of the highest concentrations of children with lead, he said.

The most recent report had 90 children on it.

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