



September 24, 2013

Dear Health Care Provider:

During 2011, we became aware of elevated blood lead levels (BLLs) among young children in Puerto Rico related to take-home lead exposure of current (and possibly previous) employees of a battery recycling facility located in Arecibo. We have documented that employees of the company were taking lead home in their work clothes and on their personal vehicles. Young children that lived or visited these homes, or rode on the vehicles, were exposed to lead.

Between 2010 and 2011, the Puerto Rico Department of Health conducted 4 voluntary lead screening clinics for the families of employees working at the battery recycling facility. Among 68 children aged <6 years, 11 (16%) had confirmed BLLs ≥ 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, the BLL at which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) previously recommended individual interventions; and 39 (57%) children aged <6 years had venous or capillary BLLs ≥ 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, the latest reference value (level of concern) for elevated BLLs in children established by CDC in 2012. To date, 52 children have been followed up for screening blood lead levels ≥ 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$. Such an elevated prevalence of BLLs among this cohort is very atypical for children in Puerto Rico and is a strong reason to intervene.

We strongly urge you to test children < 6 years of age and pregnant or lactating women for blood lead who work or live with someone who works with lead, especially any battery recycling facility; other occupations with risk for lead exposure include welders, stain glass artists and radiator repairers. Please find attached a brief questionnaire adapted from the New York State Department of Health that you may use as a tool to assess the risk of your patients for exposure to lead.

The CDC recommends that health care providers continue their role of providing anticipatory guidance as part of routine well-child care, assessing risk for exposure to lead, conducting blood lead screening in children when indicated, and treating children identified with elevated BLLs. Blood lead testing (capillary or venous) is covered by Medicaid and most private health insurance. Children found with elevated BLLs should receive follow-up services as recommended in Managing Elevated Blood Lead Levels Among Young Children:

(<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/CaseManagement/managingEBLLs.pdf>).

The American Academy of Pediatrics endorses the CDC's guidelines for blood lead testing of children and clinical management of children with elevated blood lead levels. Lead poisoning is a completely preventable illness; the impairment it may cause is irreversible.

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In 2009-2010, the National Health and Nutrition Evaluation survey estimated that 450,000 children in the United States less than 6 years have blood lead levels above the reference value. Lead harms children's nervous systems and is associated with reduced IQ, behavioral problems and learning disabilities even at what were formerly considered low levels.

Please, share this valuable information with all appropriate personnel in your practice. For further information about this investigation or lead research in general, please contact me at (787) 765-2929 or Dr. Mary Jean Brown, ScD, RN (Branch Chief, Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention, Division of Emergency and Environmental Services) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at (770) 448-7492 or by email mjb5@cdc.gov.

Cordially,



Ana C. Ríos Armendáriz, MD
Secretary