

FAQs

Federal Strategy to Reduce Childhood Lead Exposures and Impacts

What is the President's Task Force?

The President's Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children was established to enable federal agencies to scope, plan and act in concert to improve children's environmental health. The Task Force consists of 11 federal agencies and six White House offices. The Task Force is co-chaired by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The Task Force is responsible for:

- Identifying priority issues of environmental health and safety risks to children that are best addressed through collaborative interagency efforts
- Developing strategies to protect children's environmental health and safety
- Recommending and implementing interagency actions
- Communicating and disseminating information to federal, state and local decision makers for use in protecting children from environmental health and safety risks

What is the Federal Lead Strategy?

The Federal Strategy to Reduce Childhood Lead Exposures and Impacts (Federal Lead Strategy) will serve as a "roadmap" for federal agencies on actions to take to reduce childhood lead exposure. By identifying clear goals, objectives and actions, federal agencies can more easily work together and identify priorities to improve children's health.

Why are children particularly vulnerable to lead?

Children are especially vulnerable to lead because of their unique physiology and behaviors.¹ For example, organ systems (i.e. nervous, etc.) in young children are still developing, increasing the likelihood that these systems may be adversely affected by exposure to contaminants such as lead.¹ Furthermore, children consume more food, breathe more air and drink more water per unit of body weight than do adults.¹ This creates a greater chance for children to be exposed to lead from multiple sources. Young children also crawl, put their hands in their mouth and eat non-food items (called pica behavior) such as soil, increasing the likelihood of exposure to leaded dust and lead paint chips.

What types of adverse health effects can lead cause in children?

Recent research has shown adverse health effects in children with high blood lead levels as well as in children with blood levels previously thought to be safe.² Adverse health effects in children at lower blood lead levels include but are not limited to: reduced IQ and attention span, learning difficulties, behavioral issues, delayed puberty in both boys

and girls and decreased hearing.² At much higher blood lead levels children may experience abdominal pain, convulsions and loss of voluntary muscle control.² Due to past successes with reducing lead exposure (such as banning lead from gasoline and residential paint) most children exposed today tend to have lower amounts of lead in their blood.²

How is lead exposure measured in children?

Lead exposure in children is measured by its concentration in the blood. The current CDC reference level is 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$).³ CDC uses the reference level to identify children with blood lead levels that are higher than most U.S. children's levels. The reference level is not a regulatory standard, and it does not necessarily trigger an official response. The reference level may be used to identify children who have been exposed to lead and who require further action. Adopting the reference value as a level for individual intervention is a decision made based on state or local laws and regulations. A recommendation to lower the current blood lead reference value of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ to 3.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ is currently in review by the CDC. A final decision on the recommendation will be made later this year.

Is there a safe blood lead level for children?

No safe blood lead level has been identified in children and evidence of adverse health effects at low levels further underscores the need to reduce blood lead levels in children as much as possible.

How can I provide input into the development of the Federal Lead Strategy?

Interested persons can provide input to the Task Force on the development of the Federal Lead Strategy by responding to the survey at <https://ptfceh.niehs.nih.gov/activities/lead-exposures/index.htm>, by email at FedLeadStrategy@nih.gov, or by mail to Warren Friedman, Ph.D., CIH, Senior Advisor to the Director, HUD Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes, 451 7th Street SW (8236), Washington, DC 20410-3000. The Task Force has also been soliciting input at public scientific meetings and is in the process of planning more opportunities for input in the coming months.

How can I follow the development of the Federal Lead Strategy?

Information on the Federal Lead Strategy, as well as future opportunities for input, will be posted to the Task Force website at <https://ptfceh.niehs.nih.gov/activities/lead-exposures/index.htm>. We also invite you to join the Task Force email list at [Subscribe](#), through which we will send updates as new information becomes available.

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Children are Not Little Adults!*
<https://www.epa.gov/children/children-are-not-little-adults>

² National Toxicology Program. *Health Effects of Low Level Lead.*
https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/ntp/ohat/lead/final/monographhealtheffectslowlevellead_newissn_508.pdf

³ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *What Do Parents Need to Know to Protect Their Children?* https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/acclpp/blood_lead_levels.htm