



Panhandle Health District

Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 19, 2019

Contact: Katherine Hoyer

208-415-5108

Lead Levels Continue to Decrease in Silver Valley

KELLOGG, ID – Panhandle Health District’s Institutional Controls Program (ICP) completed its annual lead screening this past August in the Silver Valley and the results are encouraging.

“We continue to see an increase in people who come in to be tested, which is something we want to strongly encourage,” said Andy Helkey, ICP Program Manager. “The blood lead averages among those coming in to be tested were down significantly from 2017.”

A total of 320 residents came in to be tested during the 2018 blood lead screening week. The average lead level in children ages 0-6 living within the Bunker Hill Box was 2.6 (ug/dL) and 1.6 (ug/dL) among residents age 7-83. Average lead level in children ages 0-6 living within the Coeur d’Alene Basin was 2.4 (ug/dL) and 2.0 (ug/dL) among residents age 7-70. Testing is done through a quick and simple blood test and results are available immediately. Each summer, ICP offers a week of free testing for anyone living within the Bunker Hill Superfund site plus a \$30 incentive for testing children ages 6 months to 6 years old. Anyone living in the area can come in any time of year to be tested for free as well.

“We like to collect the tests in late summer to make sure we are gathering an accurate sample,” said Helkey. “Late summer ensures we are capturing the peak of outdoor activity when people commonly come into contact with lead in the environment.”

Lead can be found in the paint of older homes, especially those built before 1978. If your home was built before 1986, it is more likely to have lead-based plumbing pipes, fixtures, and solder. Soils and sediments along the South Fork and Lower Coeur d’Alene River and their tributaries contain harmful levels of lead, arsenic, and other heavy metals. Young children and pregnant mothers are at the greatest risk from exposure. It is easy to reduce exposure by following the safety tips below.

- Wash your hands and face with clean water or wipes before eating or drinking.
- Wash toys, bottles, and pacifiers if they come into contact with soil, sand, or dust.
- When recreating, remove dirt from clothes, toys, pets, cars, boats and camping equipment before you leave. Wash all items when you return home.

- Drink, cook, and wash with bottled water or water from home. Do not use river water.
- Eat at a table or on a clean blanket, not bare ground.
- Follow fish consumption advisories, especially for pregnant mothers and children. Find current advisories at: Fishadvisory.dhw.idaho.gov
- Play in grassy areas and avoid loose soil, sand, dust, and muddy areas.

“If we find that a child has an elevated blood lead level, we want to investigate and make sure that we find the source,” said Helkey. “We offer free confidential property assessments to identify exposure sources inside and outside of the home.”

Although results continue to improve year to year, Panhandle Health District will continue to educate and monitor blood lead levels. According to the CDC, health effects associated with lead are the same whether it enters the body through breathing or swallowing. Lead can affect almost every organ and system in the body, especially the nervous system. No safe level of lead exposure has been identified. Lead is especially dangerous for young children, whose bodies are still developing. Lead poisoning even at high levels often shows no symptoms, a simple blood lead test is the only way to know if you have been exposed.

The ICP regulates and provides assistance with construction and renovation projects on building interiors that involve ceiling and attic work, insulation removal and work in dirt basements and crawl spaces. The ICP offers several other services to help residents of the Bunker Hill Superfund Site maintain protective barriers for their health. All residents are eligible to receive 1 cubic yard of gravel or topsoil annually to maintain a protective barrier in their yard or driveway. The ICP also provides containers and pick-up services for contaminated soil disposal when homeowners undertake a small excavation project.

The fundamental purpose of the ICP is to protect the public health and assist local land transactions within the Superfund site.

Panhandle Health District provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.

###