



Public Health
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Panhandle Health District

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Healthy People in Healthy Communities

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NEWS RELEASE

Preventing Lead Exposure

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With springtime quickly approaching, we are all eager to spend more time outdoors enjoying the many trails, mountains, parks, lakes, and rivers north Idaho has to offer. While exploring the region's nature, Panhandle Health District (PHD) encourages residents and visitors to take simple precautions to avoid being exposed to lead.

The Bunker Hill Superfund Site, often referred to as the Coeur d'Alene River Basin Cleanup, is located in northern Idaho and eastern Washington where early mining, milling, and smelting methods led to environmental contamination from mine wastes. The site spans 1500 square miles including a 21-square mile area most heavily impacted by emission produced by a historic lead smelter as well as the broader river basin, which includes mining-contaminated areas in the Coeur d'Alene River corridor, adjacent floodplains, downstream water bodies, tributaries, and fill areas.

Silver Valley mines stopped discharging mine waste into the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River in the late 1960s, and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) added the site to the National Priorities List in 1983. Clean-up of the area began soon after and is on-going as communities grow, land use changes, and spring storms and floods wash the waste downstream, redepositing them along the river and throughout the chain lakes and the Coeur d'Alene River Basin.

Though lead can be found in many places in the environment, lead exposure is preventable. The key is stopping people, especially children, from coming into contact with lead. We can take simple steps to make our homes and environments more lead-safe.

Young children and pregnant mothers are at the greatest risk from exposure. It is easy to reduce exposure by following these safety tips after recreating at or near the Coeur d'Alene River Basin:

- 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.

Each summer, PHD’s Kellogg office offers a week of free testing for anyone that lives, works, or recreates within the Bunker Hill Superfund site plus a \$40 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.

Results from the August 2021 blood lead screening event:

Participant Group	Method of Collection	No. of Participants	Average Level
Age 6 mo. – 6 yrs.	Capillary	44	3.4 µg/dL
Age 6 mo. – 6 yrs.	Venous	57	1.7 µg/dL
7 years or older	Capillary	21	≤3.3 µg/dL
7 years or older	Venous	21	1.7 µg/dL

At the time of the lead screening event, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention had an established “level of concern” associated with childhood lead poisoning with a “reference value” of 5.0 µg/dL. On October 28, 2021, the CDC lowered the blood lead reference value from 5.0 µg/dL to 3.5 µg/dL. Because this change occurred after the screening event was held in August, it did not affect the event. PHD offered free in-home consultations to all families or individuals with an elevated lead level and recommended that parents or individuals follow up with their physician.

*The LeadCarell analyzer used for the capillary method has a detection limit of 3.3 µg/dL. Lab analysis of venous draws have a detection limit of 1 µg/dL.

PHD’s Institutional Controls Program (ICP), located in the PHD Kellogg office, regulates and provides assistance with construction and renovation projects for properties located within the superfund site that involve dirt disturbance activities including excavation, grading, changing the use of a property, or working in crawl spaces & attics. The ICP offers several services to help residents of the Bunker Hill Superfund Site maintain protective barriers for their health. The ICP provides containers and pick-up services for contaminated soil disposal when homeowners undertake a small excavation project as well as clean soil or gravel on such projects to help maintain remediated barriers.

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

www.panhandlehealthdistrict.org/institutional-controls-program/.

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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.