

NEWS RELEASE

Preventing Lead Exposure

Panhandle Health District – April 1, 2024



With the spring season upon us and summer not far off, more people are spending time outdoors, enjoying all the beauty and activities available in North Idaho. Panhandle Health District wants to remind residents and visitors of the Silver Valley and the Coeur d'Alene River Basin to recreate responsibly to protect their health while also having fun. Historic mining, milling, smelting, and disposal activities employed in the Silver Valley led to widespread heavy metal contamination hazards found throughout the region. These historic practices took place decades ago but left behind an abundance of contaminated materials that continue to be a threat to human health and the environment.

Extensive cleanup efforts have been ongoing in the site since 1986; however, contamination throughout the region is extensive, deep reaching, and continues to be found in area sediments and water bodies. Though risks of lead exposure may seem like an issue from the

past, lead exposure remains a widespread problem, especially within the Superfund Site. Exposure often goes unnoticed because people may have no symptoms and appear healthy. Lead can enter the bloodstream through inhalation or ingestion. A blood test is the only way to find out if a person has been exposed.

Each year the Kellogg office of Panhandle Health District holds a summer blood lead screening event for residents of the Bunker Hill Superfund Site and offers a \$50 incentive to test children 6 months to 6 years of age that live within the Site. Children 6 months to 6 years of age are at higher risk to the effects of lead because their bodies absorb more of it than adults do. Their brains and nervous systems are more sensitive to the damaging effects of lead, and exposure can result in difficulty learning, behavioral problems, hearing issues, slowed growth, and headaches. Adults and pregnant women can also be at risk for lead exposure through occupations, such as mining, construction, or welding, or by activities such as home renovations, making ceramics, shooting guns, or fishing. Lead exposure in adults can result in cardiovascular effects, increased blood pressure and the incidence of hypertension, decreased kidney function, and reproductive problems. Of high concern are pregnant women who are exposed to lead which can lead to exposure to the developing fetus.

Panhandle Health District held its 2023 lead screening event the week of August 7th – 12th. PHD tested a total of 292 individuals that live within the boundaries of the Bunker Hill Superfund Site.

Results from August 2023 blood lead screening event:

AREA	# of Children Tested 6 mo-6yrs	Average (µg/dL)	Geometric Mean (µg/dL)	# Tested 7 yr. or Older	Average (µg/dL)	Geometric Mean (µg/dL)
Box	95	2.0	1.8	53	2.2	1.7
Basin	94	2.0	1.8	50	3.4	1.9

The in-home inspections associated with this year's event showed a variety of exposure sources with the most common exposures being from:

- Recreating in un-remediated areas such as along the South Fork or the Main Coeur d'Alene Rivers.
- Occupationally related such as miners not showering and changing work clothes prior to going home.
- Lead-based paint exposures associated with renovation projects, antique furniture or toys, or old peeling, chipping paint.

PHD offers yearlong free blood lead testing to anyone that works, lives, or recreates in the Bunker Hill Superfund Site. To schedule an appointment, contact the PHD Kellogg office at (208) 783-0707. In addition, the 2024 lead screening event is scheduled for the week of August 5th – 10th. To learn more, visit www.panhandlehealthdistrict.org/institutional-controls-program/.

#

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.