



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH
Commissioner

nyc.gov/health

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NEW CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING CASES CONTINUE TO DECLINE IN NYC, BUT PERSISTS AS A SIGNIFICANT HEALTH PROBLEM

NEW YORK CITY – September 29, 2005 – There were 3,193 new childhood lead poisoning cases in New York City in 2004, a 6% decrease from 3,413 cases in 2003, and an 83% decline in cases over the past decade, according to data released today by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Despite steady improvement, lead poisoning remains a significant health problem, particularly in certain communities in Brooklyn.

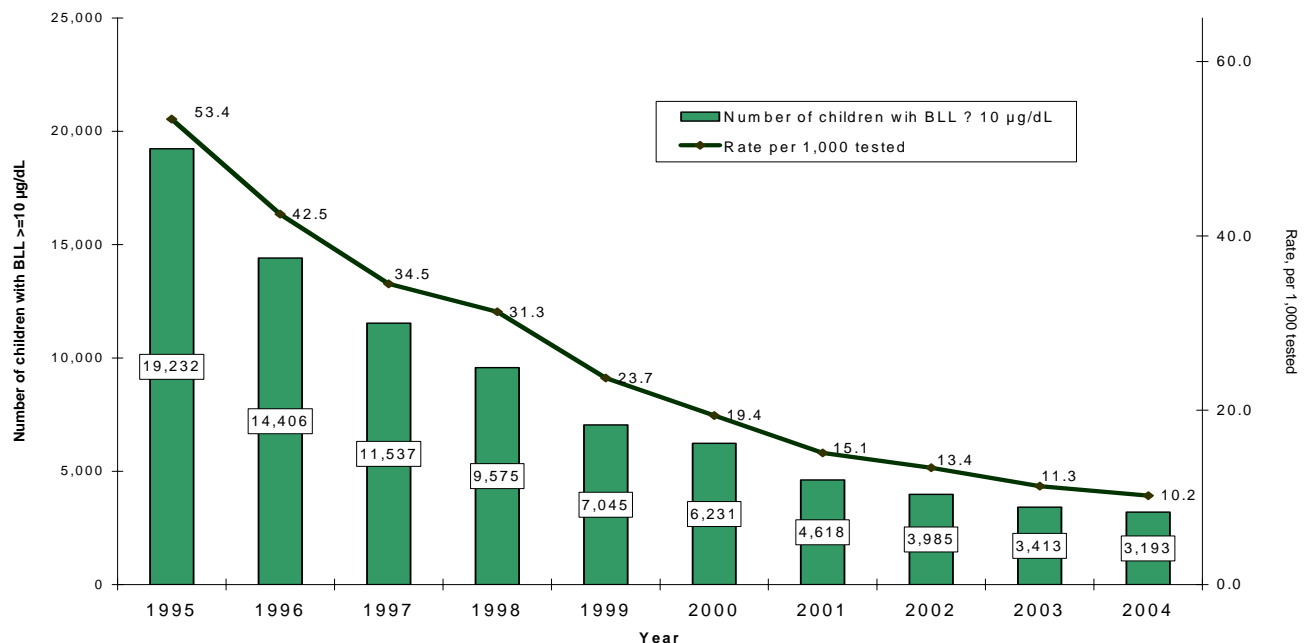
“Although significant progress continues, rates of lead poisoning remain unacceptably high in some neighborhoods. Childhood lead poisoning is preventable,” said DOHMH Commissioner Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH. “We will continue to target prevention resources and interventions to the neighborhoods at highest risk, and we will work with our partners in those communities to help eliminate lead poisoning.”

Significant Progress in Reducing Childhood Lead Poisoning

In 2004, there were 3,193 children (ages 6 months up to 6 years) with blood lead levels greater than or equal to 10 mcg/dL compared to 3,413 in 2003 and 19,232 in 1995 – an overall reduction of 83% (see Fig. 1).

In 2004, the rate of children who had elevated blood levels was 10.2 per every 1000 children tested, down from 11.3 per 1,000 in 2003 and 53.4 per 1,000 a decade ago in 1995. This progress is the result of systematic efforts to reduce sources of lead in the City’s communities.

Figure 1 - Number of Newly Identified Children with Elevated Blood Lead Levels of 10 mcg/dL or Higher, Ages 6 Months to Less Than 6 Years, 1995-2004



Neighborhoods with the Highest Number of Lead-Poisoned Children

Children in Brooklyn continue to be disproportionately affected by lead poisoning. In 2004, over 40% of new cases of childhood lead poisoning occurred in Brooklyn, where about a third of the City's children live. More than half of children newly identified with lead poisoning resided in about 30% of the neighborhoods, as defined by the United Health Fund, including Bedford Stuyvesant/Crown Heights, East Flatbush/Flatbush, Williamsburg/ Bushwick, East New York and Borough Park in Brooklyn; Crotona/Tremont and Fordham/Bronx Park and High Bridge/Morrisania in the Bronx; Washington Heights/Inwood in Manhattan; and Jamaica, Southwest Queens and West Queens in Queens.

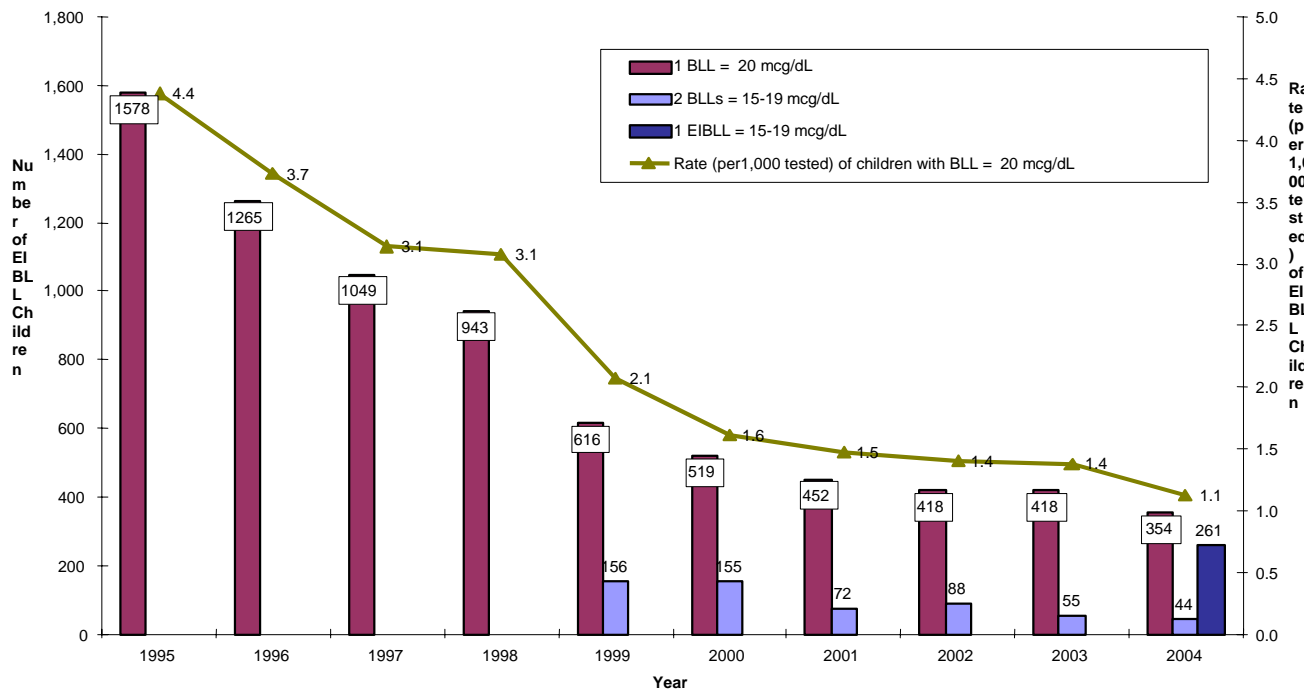
“Peeling lead paint and lead dust remain the primary source of lead exposure among the City’s children,” Commissioner Frieden added. “By law, landlords must remove lead hazards from homes where young children live, and parents are encouraged to call **311** if this does not occur. By New York State law, doctors are also required to test children for lead poisoning at ages 1 and 2. A blood test is the best way to tell whether a child has been exposed to lead.”

Change in Law Prompts More Interventions in 2004 Despite Continuing Decline in Cases

DOHMH provides environmental intervention and case management services for children in New York City with blood lead levels equal to or exceeding the Environmental Intervention Blood Lead Level (EIBLL). Between 1999 and 2004, environmental investigations were conducted for children with one blood lead level of 20 mcg/dL or greater, or two blood lead levels of 15-19 mcg/dL taken at least three months apart. In August 2004, the EIBLL was lowered to one blood lead level of 15 mcg/dL or greater. This change resulted in DOHMH providing intervention services to more City children with elevated blood lead levels.

Figure 2 shows the downward trend in number and rate of children with EIBLLs. The increase in the number of children who received environmental intervention services (659 children in 2004, compared to 473 children in 2003) reflects the lowered EIBLL, and not a rise in number of children with elevated blood lead levels.

Figure 2 - Number of Newly Identified Children with Environmental Intervention Blood Lead Levels (EIBLL) among Children ages 6 Months to Less than 6 Years, 1995-2004*



*Number of children, ages 6 months to less than 6 years, newly identified with an Environmental Intervention Blood Lead Level (EIBLL), by year: NYC, 1995-2004. From July 1999 through July 2004, the Environmental Intervention Blood Lead Level was defined as either (a) one venous blood lead level = 20 mcg/dL, or (b) two blood lead levels 15-19 mcg/dL that were drawn at least 3 months apart, where the second test was a venous test. As of August 2004, the EIBLL is defined as one venous blood lead level = 15 mcg/dL.

More Children Were Tested For Lead Poisoning

New York State law requires blood lead testing for all children at both one and two years of age. These children are at greatest risk for lead poisoning because they crawl, play on floors and can swallow lead dust from normal hand-to-mouth activities. The number of 1- and 2-year-old children tested in 2004 increased by 9% and 8% respectively, increasing the testing rate for 1-year-olds from 66% in 2003 to 72% in 2004, and for 2-year-olds from 56% to in 2003 to 60% in 2004.

New York State also requires that doctors assess the risk of lead exposure for children from 6 months to less than 6 years and perform a blood lead test if exposure to lead is suspected. The number of children, from 6 months up to 6 years, who were tested for lead increased by 4% from 2003 to 2004.

New Yorkers may call **311** or visit <http://www.nyc.gov/health> for more information about how to prevent childhood lead poisoning or to report a complaint against a landlord. For more on DOHMH's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, please visit <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/lead/lead.shtml>.

DOHMH also released information in a report to the New York City Council, in accordance with Local Law 1 of 2004, detailing the progress made towards reducing childhood lead poisoning and promoting blood lead testing among children in the five boroughs. The report can be found online at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/public/press05/ccleadreport2004.pdf>.

Prevention and Education Efforts

New York City has made tremendous progress in reducing childhood lead poisoning by employing interventions that have reduced environmental sources of lead and increased awareness about lead poisoning prevention. The City has comprehensive strategies to reduce lead exposure and increase early identification of lead poisoning through blood lead testing. Notable accomplishments in 2004 included:

- Implemented the City's new lead poisoning prevention law.
- Allocated \$500,000 for lead hazard reduction in residential buildings in the high-risk neighborhood of Bushwick.
- Provided environmental intervention services to more children at lower blood lead levels.
- Implemented new, targeted primary prevention initiatives in high-risk neighborhoods to identify and address lead paint hazard in homes of young children before lead poisoning occurs.
- Collaborated with 17 Medicaid managed care organizations and the DOHMH Early Intervention program to identify and increase testing among high-risk children lacking appropriate blood lead tests.
- Strengthened the City's Health Code requiring hardware and paint stores to post a warning sign to alert customers that dry scraping and dry sanding on painted surfaces are dangerous and illegal.
- Educated the public about the dangers of peeling paint for young children, landlord responsibility in removing lead paint hazards, and safety procedures for home renovation and repair work.
- Issued a health alert to warn New Yorkers about possible lead contamination in certain snacks and candies imported from Mexico.
- Continued the productive partnership with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) in a federally funded project, which provides financial support to building owners in high-risk areas for lead hazard repair.

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