



Foundational Public Health Services

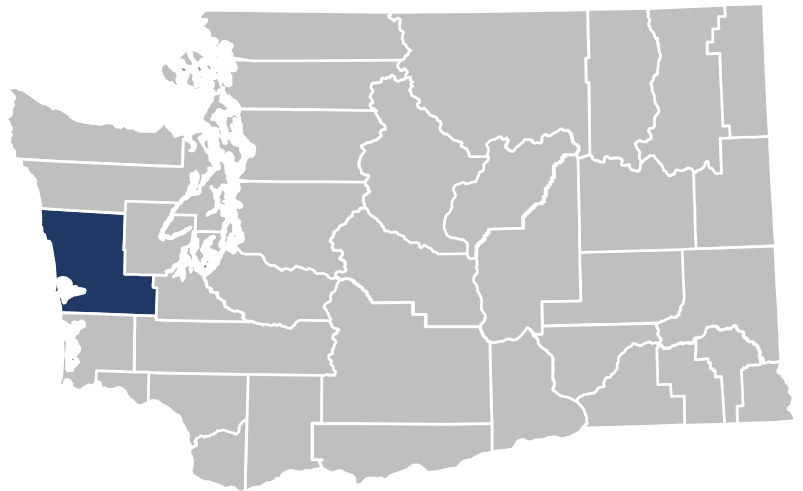
Healthy. Vital. **Everyone.** Everywhere.

Protecting Communities from Lead

Protecting Washington communities from the hazards of lead exposure is one of our state's Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS).

Lead exposure presents a health risk to everyone, but children are the most at risk.

Even low levels of lead exposure can cause serious—sometimes permanent—damage to kids less than six years old. Developing brains and nervous systems are very sensitive. Lead exposure can cause lower IQ levels, reduced attention span, and other physical and behavioral health problems.



Lead exposure is a health issue statewide. Below is one family's story from Grays Harbor County.

About lead

Lead is a naturally occurring metal element. Over the years, it's been widely used in a variety of products—from paint to gasoline. This has helped lead spread through our environment, and lead may be found in the air, soil and water, and even inside our homes.

Lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust are the main sources of lead poisoning. Lead-based paint was banned in 1978, but many older homes still have the original lead-based paint on their walls. This poses a real risk to the people living in those homes, something many families don't realize until it impacts the health of their children.

One family's story

This is what happened to a young family in Grays Harbor County. They were happy in their newly renovated home, it seemed like the perfect place for their growing family. In addition to their two kids, the family had just taken in three other children who needed a safe and stable environment. Everything was going well.

So they were shocked when—on a visit to their family doctor—they learned their children's blood samples contained alarmingly high amounts of lead.

Maria Courogen

Special Assistant, Systems Transformation, Office of the Secretary
Washington State Department of Health
360-236-4017 / maria.courogen@doh.wa.gov



FPHS—working to keep communities healthy and vital

Lead paint doesn't present the only lead exposure risk to our children, and public health works to find and mitigate potential lead hazards wherever they may be. One particularly concerning risk comes from old lead-containing water fixtures sometimes found in schools.

The 2017 legislative funds were also used to pilot a public health project to test drinking water in 500 elementary schools. This program has already tested 238 schools, and found 1,110 fixtures that needed to be replaced due to lead contaminants. Work is underway with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to replace fixtures that are leaching lead into drinking water.

Public health is also working with community water systems to find and replace lead-containing pipes.

Public health plays a critical—and unique—role in protecting people from lead exposure; a role that is essential to ensuring the health and economic vitality of our communities. FPHS funding would allow this important work to continue.

Story continued...

Their doctor reported these findings to the State Department of Health through the state's electronic data system. This alerted public health investigators who went to the family's home to collect dust samples. The samples were tested and showed hazardous levels of lead, likely stirred up during the home's recent remodeling.

The kids are getting the follow-up medical care they need. And the family now has help fixing their home's lead problem through the State Department of Commerce's Weatherization Program.

Investment makes a difference

Fortunately, 2017 funds from the Legislature had allowed the state to bolster its lead testing program, and to provide more help for people affected by lead poisoning. The funds were also used to encourage health providers in high-risk areas to screen more kids for lead.

Children most at risk are often from low income families, and state and local public health have been working together to help find and assist at-risk families. But without continued adequate funding, the program itself is at risk.

Lead screening is essential in diagnosing elevated lead levels, and quickly getting kids the treatment they need. In the first half of 2017, 11,271 at-risk children under six were tested for lead in Washington State.

Thanks to the legislative funding, that number increased by 1,663 to 12,934 in the first half of 2018. That increase made a real difference to the lives of people in our communities, including that family in Grays Harbor County.

FPHS Partners

The Governmental Public Health System

