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Children Need Screening Tests for Lead at Ages One and Two
International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week celebrated October 20-26

Brewster, NY—Lead is an environmental toxin and exposed children face serious health risks with lifelong impact. Most lead poisoning cases in children result from ingesting or inhaling dust or chips in old homes built before 1978. In Putnam County approximately 30% of homes fall into this category. Preventing exposure to paint products and others containing lead, as well as early identification and intervention, are all crucial efforts to prevent and reduce lead poisoning. Children must be screened at age one and then again at two. International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, celebrated annually each October, helps raise awareness of this continuing problem and the appropriate precautions that should be taken.

“Lead poisoning has very serious consequences for young children because their brains are undergoing rapid development,” explains Allen Beals, MD, Commissioner of Health for Putnam County, “and these consequences can affect a child’s growth, behavior and ability to learn and are completely preventable. That is why NYS Public Health Law requires children have their blood lead levels (BLL) tested at age one, and again at two, by healthcare providers. The PCDOH can also assist in getting these screenings done.”

Young children learning to crawl spend a lot of time on the floor and put things in their mouth. Frequent washing of hands, face, toys, bottles and pacifiers is very important. A foundation of good nutrition and eating foods high in calcium, iron and vitamin C in particular, can limit the impact if lead is ingested or inhaled.

“Lead can also harm babies before they are even born, if the pregnant mother is exposed,”

continues Dr. Beals, who had a private practice as an obstetrician/gynecologist for more than 20 years before taking up public service.

Lead dust is often invisible and generated during remodeling or renovation, when old paint is scraped or sanded, but can be present at other times as well, settling on windowsills, floors and toys. Most children with lead poisoning do not look or feel sick until much later in the course of the illness.

Nonetheless, damage may be occurring. The only way to know is to have a blood lead test. Reducing lead exposure however should be more routine. Tips include:

- Assume any home built before 1978 contains lead paint. Keep all painted surfaces in good condition. Renters living in homes built before 1978 should ask landlords to safely repair any peeling paint. If the landlord is not responsive, local building inspectors or town clerks may be able to assist.
- Take the proper precautions before repairing peeling paint or performing home renovations. Pregnant women, babies and children should avoid all peeling and chipped paint. Call the Health Department for information on how to paint and repair safely. Safe work practices for renovations are key to preventing contamination in a home.
- Avoid cooking, storing or serving food in leaded glass, crystal and pewter and painted china or pottery from Asia, Latin America or the Middle East.
- Individuals with jobs or hobbies with lead exposure should shower and change clothes and shoes before going home. Work clothes should be washed separately from other clothes.

A list of children's products that contain lead is available on the Consumer Product Safety Commission website at www.cpsc.gov or by calling 800-638-2772. For more information on how to prevent childhood lead poisoning, call the Putnam County Department of Health at 845- 808-1390 or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at: www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/lead.

The mission of the Putnam County Department of Health is to improve and protect the health of our community. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.gov; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.