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Screening Tests for Lead Help Protect Children;
International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week celebrated October 19-25

Brewster, NY—Children exposed to the environmental toxin lead face serious health risks with lifelong impact. Most child poisoning cases result from ingesting chips or inhaling dust from lead-based paint common in old homes built before 1978. In Putnam County approximately 30% of homes fall into this category. Preventing this exposure, and early identification and intervention are all crucial efforts. As a result public health law requires blood lead level (BLL) screening for children at age one and then again at two. International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, celebrated annually each October, helps raise awareness of this serious issue and the appropriate precautions that should be taken.

“Lead poisoning has very serious neurological consequences for young children and these cases are completely preventable,” explains Allen Beals, MD, Commissioner of Health for Putnam County. “Their developing brains are particularly vulnerable and exposure can affect children’s behavior and ability to learn, as well as their growth. The first step is to make sure your child has his or her blood lead levels checked at age one, and again at two. Speak to your healthcare provider or the PCDOH. Armed with the knowledge that testing is mandated by law, parents are in a good position to ensure this is done. We can assist in getting these screenings, or provide a quick test in our office by appointment.”

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. Even if surfaces appear in good condition, the opening and closing of doors and windows covered with a lead-based paint will generate lead dust. 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 your child’s BLL tested.

Lead exposure can occur in other ways as well, and reducing exposure should be routine and a priority for everyone. 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.](#) Hiring a certified contractor ensures that proper safety measures are followed.
- 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, such as carpentry or hunting, should shower and change clothes and shoes before going home. Potentially contaminated clothes should be washed alone.

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, emergency preparedness, 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. ###