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**Lead Screenings and Water Testing Help Protect Children**  
*Lead Poisoning Prevention Week Commemorated October 23-29*

Brewster, NY—Children who are exposed to the toxin lead can have serious, long lasting health problems. That is why public health law requires testing lead levels in children’s blood at age one and again at two. It is also why last month Governor Cuomo signed legislation requiring immediate testing of drinking water in all New York State schools by October 31. The good news is that lead poisoning is preventable and that’s one of the main messages of International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, from October 23 to 29.

“It’s hard to believe testing school water was not required before, given the health risks especially to young children,” says Michael Nesheiwat, MD, Interim Commissioner of Health in Putnam. “We have been working with all the school districts in the county, providing technical assistance to them and their water operators, to help them comply with these new requirements.” Until then schools with unacceptable levels are providing alternate water supplies for both cooking and drinking. The schools must also report the water test results to parents, and the New York State and Putnam County health departments.

Ironically and heartbreakingly, it was about a year ago in September—a month before International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week 2015—that the lead poisoning of numerous children gained national attention with reports from Flint, Michigan. Elevated blood lead levels in children there had almost doubled after the city switched its water source.

In Putnam County, most child lead-poisoning cases have been the result of ingesting chips or inhaling dust from lead-based paint common in older homes built before 1978. In fact, approximately 73% of Putnam cases of childhood lead poisoning are from a lead-paint source. Preventing this exposure, early identification

of children with high levels, and treatment, are all important efforts.

“Lead poisoning can have serious neurological results for young children, with developing brains,” continues Dr. Nesheiwat. “It can affect their behavior and ability to learn, along with their growth.” Parents should make sure their child has his or her blood lead levels checked at one year of age, and again at two years of age as mandated, and at older ages if there is reason for concern. Healthcare providers can perform or order this test, or contact the PCDOH for testing assistance.

Very young children are at highest risk. When learning to crawl, they spend a lot of time on the floor and put things in their mouth. Frequent washing of hands, face, toys, bottles and pacifiers is important. For children and youth of all ages, a foundation of good nutrition and eating foods high in calcium, iron and vitamin C in particular, can limit the impact of lead, if it is ingested or inhaled. Lead can also harm babies before they are born, if a pregnant mother is exposed to possible lead hazards.

Lead dust is hard to see. A problem can occur when lead-painted surfaces are disturbed in any way. Even cutting a small hole when remodeling, or opening and closing doors and windows, covered with lead-based paint, for example, can generate lead dust. This dust then falls on windowsills, floors and toys. Children with lead poisoning do not look or feel sick in the beginning. However, health problems can still start. The only way to know is to test a child’s blood lead level.

Lead poisoning can happen in other ways as well. Follow these tips to be safe:

- 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.
- Check toys and other children’s products because some may contain lead. A list is available on the Consumer Product Safety Commission website at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) or by calling 800-638-2772.
- If you have a job or hobbies where you are exposed to lead (carpentry, hunting, stained glass work, or those that use leaded gasoline for example), be extra careful. Shower, and change clothes and shoes, before going home. Clothes that may be contaminated should be washed alone.
- Assume homes built before 1978 contain lead paint. Keep painted surfaces in good condition. If lead surfaces are disturbed, don’t sweep—damp mopping is a must. Better yet, consider hiring a certified contractor when renovating or remodeling. They follow strict Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines to prevent contamination. Call the health department with questions. Renters should ask landlords to safely repair any peeling paint. If the landlord is not responsive, local town building inspectors may be able to assist.

Call the Putnam County Department of Health at 845-808-1390 for more information or visit the New York State

Department of Health web site at: [www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/lead](http://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](http://www.putnamcountyny.gov); or visit our social media sites on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/putnamhealth](http://www.facebook.com/putnamhealth) and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY. ###