

Health Advisory: Lead Exposure

Minnesota Department of Health April 1, 2016 11:00 CST

Action Steps:

Local and tribal health departments: Please forward to hospitals, clinics and physicians (including pediatricians and obstetrician-gynecologists) in your jurisdiction.

Hospitals and clinics: Please distribute to healthcare providers.

Healthcare providers:

- Know the signs and symptoms of lead poisoning.
- Consider lead poisoning in Fraser Shipyards workers, and advise that family members be evaluated for lead exposure and poisoning.
- Assess individuals presenting with symptoms of lead poisoning for lead exposure, ask about potential lead exposures and evaluate as needed.
- Test the blood lead level of any individual potentially exposed.
 - The reference level for lead in blood is 5 ug/dL in children and adults. Individuals with blood lead levels above the reference level should be educated on the risks of lead and methods to reduce their exposure.

Background

Fraser Shipyards in Superior, Wisconsin has been retrofitting a carrier ship and, in doing so, workers were exposed to lead and potentially other metals. A number of workers have already been tested and have had elevated blood lead levels (up to 62 ug/dL). All exposed workers are being told to seek evaluation by their health care provider.

Because lead dust can be carried home on work clothes, shoes, skin and hair, and because lead dust can contaminate their vehicles, workers' family members may also be exposed to lead. "Take-home" lead can have adverse effects on children's and adults' health. Children under age 6 and pregnant women or developing fetuses can experience particularly dangerous health effects from lead exposure. Adverse effects can include learning, behavior and health problems in young children; miscarriages, premature births and stillbirths in pregnant women; and impacted brain and nervous system development in developing fetuses. In men, elevated blood levels can cause impotence, reduced sex drive and infertility.

Symptoms

Early symptoms of lead poisoning can include: fatigue, upset stomach, vomiting, constipation, decreased appetite, irritability, anxiety, depression, headache, insomnia, metallic taste in the mouth, reproductive problems, high blood pressure, lack of concentration and muscle and/or joint pain. Notably, there may be no symptoms with elevated, concerning lead levels.

The Minnesota and Wisconsin health departments are conducting a joint investigation of this situation along with local health departments and other government agencies.

For more information on lead, visit the MDH website at www.health.state.mn.us/lead or call the Minnesota Department of Health at 651-201-4620.

This HAN is for Carlton, Cook, Lake, and St. Louis counties. A copy of this HAN is available in PDF and Word format at www.health.state.mn.us/han/. The content of this message is intended for public health and health care personnel and response partners who have a need to know the information to perform their duties. It is for official use only. Do not distribute beyond the intended recipient groups as described in the action items of this message.