

Lead-Safe Texas

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Blood Lead Surveillance Branch
Texas Department of State Health Services
dshs.texas.gov/lead

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With the support of communities throughout Texas, regional public health offices, and Texas healthcare workers, BLSB is working diligently toward a safer, healthier Texas.

About this Newsletter

This newsletter provides information about lead poisoning prevention. You can find all newsletters on our website at dshs.texas.gov/lead/newsletters.

About the Blood Lead Surveillance Branch

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Blood Lead Surveillance Branch (BLSB) maintains a surveillance system of blood lead test results for children and adults. Our goal is to eliminate lead poisoning as a public health problem in Texas. We do this by working with health, housing, and environmental organizations. With the support of communities, regional public health offices, and Texas health care workers, BLSB is working diligently toward a safer, healthier Texas.

What is Lead?

Lead is a highly toxic metal. In the past, lead caused extensive environmental contamination and health problems in many parts of the world. In 1978, the federal government banned the sale of lead-containing paint for consumer use to reduce the amount of lead in the environment.

If a home was built before 1978, there may be a chance it contains lead-based paint. Lead can also be in soil, drinking water, amulets, pottery, cosmetics and even toys.

Testing

Blood lead testing is required by law for all Medicaid children ages 1 and 2. Testing is also required for Medicaid children ages 3 to 6 that have not been previously tested and for all Head Start children prior to enrollment.

Testing can be done by a capillary or venous test. The capillary test, or finger prick, is usually the first step in determining if a child has lead in their blood. While this test is quicker and less invasive, it can be less accurate. The venous test is often used to confirm finger prick results and can take a few days to get results. Since there are not always symptoms when a child has lead in their blood, **testing is the best way to determine if a child been exposed to lead.**

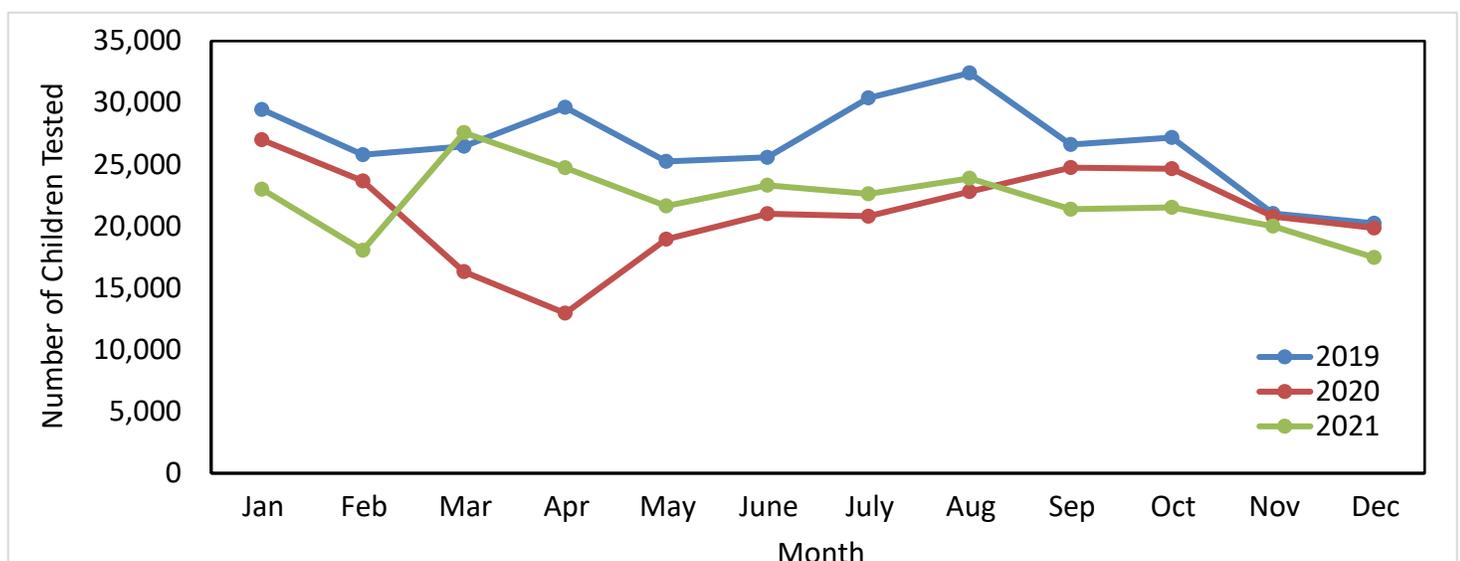


Want more information on testing? Visit dshs.texas.gov/lead

COVID-19 and Testing Trends

The number of children tested in Texas has not rebounded to pre-pandemic 2019 counts in children younger than age 6. While there was a spike in testing in March of 2021, the rest of the year shows testing at slightly above 2020 counts but still below 2019 counts.

Figure 1: Number of Texas Children Tested for Lead Younger than age 6, by Month and Year



Source: DSHS Blood Lead Surveillance Branch. Note: Data considered provisional and subject to change.



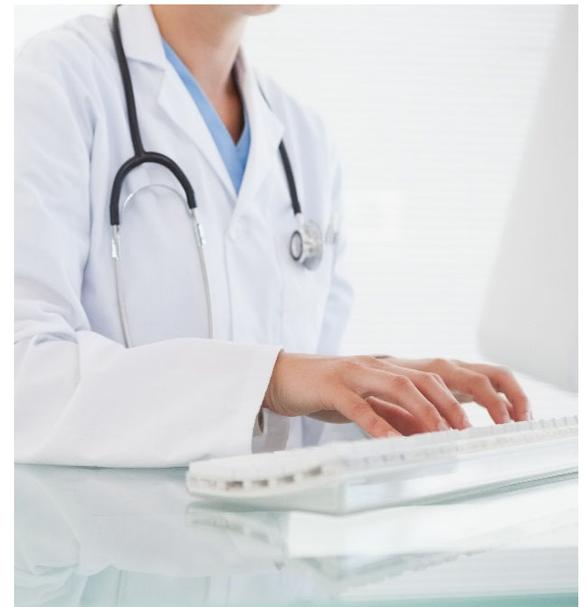
Office of Inspector General Report

A recent study of [2021 Medicaid claims data by the Office of Inspector General \(OIG\)](#) revealed that of the 386,846 children enrolled in Medicaid in Texas at the 24-month eligibility, 266,397 of them did not receive a blood lead screening test at age 2. This equates to 68.86%, or around two-thirds of enrolled children. This report also found that a higher proportion of Medicaid-enrolled children received a blood lead screening test at the one-year mark compared to the second year. The most common barriers cited by practitioners in this study were missed appointments and lapses in Medicaid coverage.

Reporting Results

Reporting test results to BLSB Texas Child Lead Registry is a vital step in the testing process. This surveillance data is used to inform medical and health professionals, target outreach activities, and create educational materials. Texas law requires reporting of all blood lead test results – **both elevated and non-elevated** – for children age 14 and younger. Physicians, laboratories, hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare facilities must report all blood lead tests to the Texas Child Lead Registry.

Electronic reporting of blood lead test results is preferred because it ensures that the tests are entered into the database in a timely and efficient manner, allowing for quick and easy access to the data and faster follow-up on elevated blood lead levels. While most results are reported electronically, **6.5% of results are still reported via fax.**



How to Report Electronically:

- Complete the Electronic Reporting Sign-up Form, found [here](#). Once you submit your information, someone from the BLSB will be in contact with you to provide instructions on how to upload the results to a secure ftp server.
- Laboratories can submit via National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS), click [here](#).
- If using Lead Care II, a software can be downloaded to streamline electronic reporting, [here](#).

Test Your Knowledge

Think you have a good understanding of lead topics? Take our quiz!

1. What is the most common way children are exposed to lead?
 - a. Lead pipes
 - b. Paint chips
 - c. Air pollution
 - d. Lead pencils
2. What blood lead results must be reported to the Texas Blood Lead Surveillance Branch?
 - a. Only results for children enrolled in Medicaid
 - b. Only results that are elevated
 - c. All results for all children under 14 years old
 - d. No blood lead results must be reported
3. What is the *best* way to report blood lead test results?
 - a. You don't have to report results
 - b. Electronically
 - c. Fax
 - d. Letter in mail
4. For what group of children is blood lead testing required by law?
 - a. Medicaid children at 1 and 2 years old
 - b. Medicaid children 3 to 6 years old that haven't previously been tested
 - c. Head start children prior to enrollment
 - d. All the above

Thank you for taking our quiz!

Answers: 1b, 2c, 3b, 4d

New Blood Lead Reference Value

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced an update to the [Blood Lead Reference Value \(BLRV\)](#) from 5.0 micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$) to 3.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ in children on October 28, 2021. While no blood level of lead is safe, the BLRV is a screening tool to identify children with higher levels of lead in their blood compared to most children and is based on the blood lead level distribution in U.S. children ages 1 to 5. The BLRV is a guide that helps determine action thresholds for follow-up and prioritizes communities with the most need for primary prevention of exposure. Texas BLSB has already taken steps towards implementing this new reference value and plans to implement the new BLRV of 3.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ in January 2023.



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