



**Ohio Minority Health Strike Force
Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition Testimony
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There is no safe level of lead in the blood. Lead is a devastating neurotoxin that damages children’s brains and bodies. Young children are especially vulnerable to lead poisoning because as crawlers and toddlers they may be easily exposed to lead dust from lead-paint. They may also be exposed to lead poisoning through water-based baby formula or drinking water as growing kids. The American Medical Association and Centers for Disease Control state that lead can be especially destructive to children still-developing neurological, cognitive and social-emotional abilities. While the risk of child lead exposure exists throughout our state, black and brown children are disproportionately at risk of lead poisoning due in part to the concentration of old housing stock in our cities, as well as other social determinants of health, including a legacy of discriminatory policies and practices that place minority children at a unique risk of harm from lead poisoning. We urge the Minority Health Strike Force to make the prevention of lead poisoning a priority.

We applaud Governor DeWine and the Legislature for making critical investments to address childhood lead poisoning in the state budget, as well as the creation of the Governor’s Lead Advisory Committee to identify further action steps. While the COVID-19 pandemic has understandably become an urgent health priority, we cannot lose the momentum for addressing the lead crisis. In February, 2020, our coalition released a 9-point “[Action Plan for Lead Free Children](#)” calling for specific action steps to fundamentally change how we confront the lead crisis by taking a primary prevention approach. We ask the Strike Force to take these nine recommendations, listed below, under consideration. Details for each of these actions can be found in the Action Plan (attached).

1. *Help Homeowners & Landlords Eliminate Lead Hazards*
2. *Make Rental Housing Lead-Safe*
3. *Protect Children from Lead During Renovation & Demolition*
4. *Disclose Lead Hazards & Engage Ohioans*
5. *Empower Schools & Early Learning Programs to Keep Children Lead Safe*
6. *Remove Lead from Drinking Water*
7. *Build a Strong Lead Workforce*
8. *Research New Ways to Protect Children from Lead*
9. *Improve Supports for Children Exposed to Lead*

Although no part of the state is free from the risk of lead, the highest rates of reported child lead poisoning in Ohio tend to be found in communities that are predominantly African-American and low-income.¹ In Cleveland, for example, 1 in 4 children entering kindergarten have a history of lead poisoning.² Statewide, over 66% of Ohio’s housing stock was built before 1980. An estimated 339,320 occupied housing units have children under 6 living in them with possible lead hazards.³

¹ Toledo Lead Poisoning Prevention Commission, The Effects of Lead Poisoning on African -American Low-Income Families in Toledo, Ohio (March 26, 2016), Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, The Ohio State University. <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/my-product/the-effects-of-lead-poisoning-on-african-american-low-income-families-in-toledo-ohio/>. Ohio Department of Health, Ohio Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, Final Report on Targeted Testing Plan for Childhood Lead Poisoning (April 30, 2013), The Ohio State University Statistical Consulting Service. <https://www.ohhn.org/docs/OhiosHighRiskLeadModelFinalReport2013.pdf>

² Fischer, R., Steh, S., Chan, T. “Early Childhood Lead Exposure among Cleveland Kindergarteners by Neighborhood and School Enrollment.” (Jan. 2019). <https://dailymedia.case.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/07095808/Lead-Report-CMSD.pdf>

³ Columbia Law School, The Cost of Childhood Lead Poisoning in Ohio” (2019) Accessed at: https://www.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/clinics/health-advocacy/ohio_cba.pdf

