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NEWS

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Correction - \$3.55 Million Needed to Assess Lead-Poisoned Children's Homes

Milwaukee – COLE issues a correction to its October 1 press release regarding its 2021 Milwaukee Budget request. COLE now urges the Milwaukee Common Council and Mayor Barrett to increase the 2021 Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) budget by \$3.55 million to provide funding for the MHD to conduct lead inspections and issue consequent abatement orders in the homes of Milwaukee children who are lead-poisoned at or above the threshold of 5 mcg/dl. The amount of \$1.6 million stated earlier by the MHD was found by the MHD to be in error. *That level (\$1.6 million) would still leave about 1300 children poisoned in 2021 without the level of safety provided by a home assessment.*

Currently, MHD resources are so limited that lead inspections are conducted only in the homes of children determined to be lead-poisoned at or above a relatively high threshold – 20 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood (20 mcg/dl). This is only about 6% of those found to be poisoned.

However, **5 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood (5 mcg/dl)** is the level that defines a lead-poisoned child according to WI Statute 254.11(9) and CDC recommendations.

In 2019, only 115 cases in Milwaukee reached the high threshold of 20 mcg/dl. Consequently, the MHD inspected homes lived in and frequented by 140 children (some qualifying under other criteria) and abated 155 homes. Screenshots of data provided by the MHD show that this high threshold meant that the homes of ~1745 children identified as lead-poisoned in 2019 were not inspected for sources of lead. (See MHD data below.)

*Venous highest blood lead test per child under 6 years ...
(headings added by COLE for clarification)

mcg/dl test results Number of individuals

5 - 9.9	1368	*
10 - 14.9	271	*
15 - 19.9	106	*
20 - 39.9	101	*
40 or Greater	14	*

*Data provided by Marivel Montejano, Director of Home Environmental Health Service, MHD

Highlighted in yellow are those children in 2019 whose elevated blood lead levels triggered attempts to assess their residences. Providing the resources needed to assess the homes of children poisoned at the level of 5 mcg/dl is a critical first step in triggering abatement, greater parental awareness, case monitoring, and inhibiting the continued poisoning of children within such households.

Therefore, COLE is requesting \$3.55 million be allocated for the MHD budget to make such assessments possible.

Based on the 2019 data, a 5 mcg/dl threshold will trigger aggressive follow-up for 16 times the current number of lead-poisoned children. Therefore, in 10 years this program will have responded to ~17,450 poisoned children otherwise not included in lead inspection and lead abatement efforts. This program will also have removed a critical barrier - assessment needed to trigger abatement - to greatly increase the coterie of lead-abated properties in Milwaukee.

Recent [research](#) by Dr. Emily Lynch and her UWM colleague Dr. Helen Meier determined that being poor, non-white and a renter increases one's likelihood of being lead poisoned. In recognition of the long-lasting stamp of racism on Milwaukee housing, COLE feels it is crucial that the Common Council and Mayor Barrett act *now* to remove lead hazards by enabling assessments at the lower threshold. COLE Chair Richard Diaz says, "While 'the arc of the moral universe is long,' it is up to us to make it 'bend toward justice.'"

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The Coalition on Lead Emergency, COLE, wants all residents of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to live in an environment where each known source of lead exposure is eliminated. Therefore, COLE is dedicated to creating a sustainable lead safe environment in Milwaukee by engaging a broad range of community partners. It is a collective of nonprofits, environmentalists, educators, doctors, community members and civic activists with three foci: education, workforce development and organizing.