

## ***The Changing Face of Lead Poisoning Prevention – Senate Bill 460***

*by Sapna Mysoor, MPH, Health Educator, Los Angeles County Department of Health Services' Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (LA CLPPP)*

Earlier this year, a new law went into effect that will change the future of lead poisoning prevention efforts in California. SB 460, which became effective January 1, focuses on protecting children from lead hazards in their homes *before* they can become poisoned. Until this year, health and housing authorities were only permitted to investigate homes of children who were already poisoned and were unable to take action on complaints or reports of potentially hazardous construction.

Under the new law, buildings deemed “untenable” due to the presence of lead hazards are in violation of state housing laws. In addition, laboratories are required to report the results of all blood lead tests.

Lead hazards are described as:

- deteriorated lead-based paint,
- lead contaminated dust,
- lead contaminated soil, and;
- the disturbance of lead-based paint without containment.

This means that any paint that is chipping or flaking is regarded as a danger. The new law gives state and local health and housing agencies the authority to require that deteriorating paint be repaired in a safe manner in both residential and public buildings. Health and housing officials can also issue a “cease and desist” order on any activities that create lead hazards. Landlords and property owners that fail to comply will have fines imposed upon them. In addition to the fines, tenants are permitted to withhold rent if the lead hazards continue to exist, giving landlords another incentive to comply with the new laws.

Furthermore, contractors, other construction personnel and trainers who falsely claim to be state certified are now in violation of state law and those individuals can incur criminal charges and/or fines of up to \$1,000.

“This law is a major victory in our fight to prevent lead exposure,” says Eleanor Long, MPH, Health Education Manager for the county’s lead program. “Previously, we had no way of knowing where lead hazards existed unless we had reports of children with lead poisoning. Parents would call us to report someone sanding old paint, yet we could only advise the parent to have their child’s blood tested. Now, we can stop the work until lead safe work practices are used.”

### **Do you suspect the presence of lead?**

The county health department’s hotline (1-800-LA-4-LEAD) is available for anyone to report improper remodeling that threatens a neighborhood with lead dust. The state housing department also has a toll-free hotline (1-866-557-7368).

LA CLPPP and Southern California Health & Housing Council (SCHHC)

The Los Angeles County Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (CLPPP) is dedicated to the elimination of lead poisoning in Los Angeles County. Much of what has been accomplished to date is the result of collaboration, resource sharing and common goals among the agencies, businesses, and other stakeholders that participate in lead poisoning prevention efforts. CLPPP continues to target areas where screenings should be increased, so that more children who have been poisoned by lead can be identified.

The Southern California Health and Housing Council (SCHHC), established in 1994, is comprised of agencies with a vested interest in health and housing issues. Council members meet monthly to discuss various issues related to lead safety. The Council's goals include the promotion of legislation, advocacy for healthy low-cost housing, education of parents, providers, and politicians, promotion of child lead screening, and the elimination of lead hazards. Council members were instrumental in the drafting and passage of SB 460.

CLPPP is also partnered with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The CDC-Lead grant monies will be used to enforce the mandates of SB 460 throughout the county. In a collaborative project with the Los Angeles City Housing Department known as Systematic Code Enforcement Program, CDC staff will assist with enforcement of the provisions by working with city inspectors as expert witnesses, and providing forensic evidence during the prosecution of non-compliant housing owners. Prior to launching the project, CDC staff will take responsibility for training 80 inspectors on how to recognize lead-based paint hazards. The new grant also allows CDC staff to conduct periodic monitoring of contractors and laborers involved in the repair and/or renovation of pre-1978 buildings. CDC staff will also assess citizens' complaints and respond to those that meet the criteria for investigation.

The HUD grant serves as a resource for lead abatement in targeted low-income neighborhoods within the county. Monies from the grant are used to eliminate lead hazards in major structural components of homes such as windows and doors, which contain high levels of lead-based paint and are more prone to chipping. Property owners targeted by the HUD grant may apply for lead hazard reduction funds.

For information about these services and about how to prevent lead poisoning generally, call 1-800-LA-4-LEAD.