

Childhood lead testing in San Juan County, NM

Among children born between 2010 and 2014, the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) estimates that 10.6% of children in San Juan County were tested for lead poisoning at or before age 6 (<https://nmtracking.org/en/data-query/>). This was greater than the proportion of children born between 2010 and 2014 at or before age 6 who were tested for lead poisoning throughout the state of New Mexico (8.6%).

Among people who were tested for blood lead levels in San Juan County between 2010 and 2014, 3.2% had an elevated blood lead level (EBLL) (a blood lead level above 5 µg/dL) with an average value of 8.3 µg/dL. In comparison, among those who were tested throughout New Mexico in the same time period, 3.7% had an EBLL with an average value of 8.4 µg/dL.

What should I do if I think my child has been exposed to lead?

If your child is under the age of 6 and has never been tested for blood lead or has not been tested since the suspected lead exposure occurred, work with your healthcare provider to get your child tested for lead. Managed health care organizations and third-party payers should fully cover the costs of screening and follow-up. A small amount of blood will be drawn and it can then be tested for lead. If your child has an EBLL, your doctor will work with the NMDOH to determine the source(s) of lead you are being exposed to. There are a multitude of lead sources that children can come into contact with which can include lead-based paints used in homes built before 1978, some jewelry and toys, folk medicines and remedies, and drinking water, for example (<http://NMHealth.org/go/lead>). The NMDOH has set up specific guidelines for doctors on how to manage elevated blood lead levels, depending on how high they are: <https://nmhealth.org/publication/view/general/350/>

If your child does not have a regular healthcare provider, there are clinics in New Mexico that provide services on a sliding scale. A list of these clinics can be found here: http://www.needymeds.org/free_clinics.taf?_function=list&state=nm

What should I do if I think there could be lead in my drinking water?

Lead in drinking water is primarily from materials and components associated with the water distribution system and plumbing. Lead is typically an “endpoint” problem, with the highest concentrations of lead near the tap. Lead may be present in various parts of the plumbing system such as lead solder, brass fixtures, and lead pipes.

The only way to determine how much lead is present in the drinking water is to have the water tested. Drinking water certified laboratories should be used, and can be called for sample bottles and collection instructions. For a list of laboratories currently certified for drinking water analyses in New Mexico, go to <https://www.env.nm.gov/dwb/lccnm.htm>.

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New Mexico Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (CLPPP)

The NMDOH CLPPP works with healthcare providers and childcare services throughout the state to increase knowledge and compliance in regards to requirements and guidelines around childhood blood lead testing (explained on the next page). Increasing the proportion of children tested statewide has been, and will continue to be a priority of the NMDOH CLPPP. The program also collects and analyzes blood lead level data, and in collaboration with healthcare providers, offers case management services to children and adults with EBLL (above 5 µg/dL).

Requirements and guidelines:

NMDOH recommends that children be tested for lead at 12 months and again at 24 months of age, and if children between the ages of 36 months and 72 months have not been previously screened for lead poisoning. Lead testing is a requirement for children enrolled in Medicaid. In general, for children under the age of 6 who have never been tested for a blood lead level, the child should be tested for lead. The parents or guardians can request this blood lead test through the primary care provider. Depending on insurance coverage, the cost of a blood lead test can range from \$10 to \$75 (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/su6302a6.htm>). A lead result of 5 µg/dL or greater is the beginning of the investigation for the source of lead for that child.