

2017 NJ GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Where the Candidates Stand on Preventing Lead Poisoning

Question: Lead is a powerful toxic metal that permanently affects child brain development and is especially harmful for infants and young children. According to the Center for Disease Control, there is no safe level of lead in a child's body. Even small levels of lead have lifelong effects on children's brains and bodies. Yet almost 25 percent of newly tested New Jersey children have at least some lead in their blood, with 3 percent above the level where state law requires intervention. Although New Jersey has made strides in fighting lead poisoning, progress has slowed.

If elected, what direct action steps will you take to permanently end lead poisoning for New Jersey's children?

Kim Guadagno, Republican Candidate

When it comes to clean drinking water, there is no balance. Every citizen in this state has the right to turn on their tap and know that their water is safe to drink. As governor, I want to ensure we have one of the best water programs in the nation that ensures that our drinking water is safe to drink. While I know that the DEP is rightfully moving forward with recommendations to set standards for additional contaminants, I think more can be done, faster.

First, I want to focus on preventing our waters from being polluted by continuing to support our hazardous waste cleanup program. While we cannot set standards for every one of the thousands of unregulated chemicals in the environment, we need to ensure we have the best scientists available and act quickly on their recommendations when they propose to add a new contaminant to the list. Second, we must insist our water companies deliver clean water for everyone and utilize new, modern treatments to ensure the public's health and safety.

On lead, it is important to realize that the biggest threat is from lead paint, and I fully intend to fund the lead detection and remediation programs. No child in this state should suffer from lead poisoning. I also support the continued testing for lead in our schools and the requirement that all schools be required to provide clean water.

Phil Murphy, Democratic Candidate

In 2014, 11 cities and two counties in the state had a higher percentage of children with elevated lead levels than Flint did in 2015. Despite this crisis, Governor Christie and Lieutenant Governor Guadagno raided the Lead Hazard Control Assistance Fund, which funds lead remediation efforts, to make up for their own lack of fiscal discipline. I will end this practice. I am also open to all ideas on how to ensure that lead remediation efforts are funded over the long term.

I also believe that we need to address the root causes of lead poisoning, which includes lead in our water supply and lead paint exposure. On the issue of water, we must address our water infrastructure, as the corrosion of aging pipes causes lead to leak into the water. I will update our state's water supply plan, which hasn't been updated since 1996, so investments in water infrastructure can be targeted appropriately. And with respect to lead paint, I am supportive of efforts that would require more frequent lead paint inspections to ensure that our children aren't being exposed to lead.

Seth Kaper-Dale, Green Party Candidate

Addressing the lead crisis in NJ has been a key issue to my campaign. In the past month I rallied in front of the DEP, handed out pamphlets around the state, and have been in the newspaper demanding that the findings of the June 30th, 2017 Lead Assessments be taken more seriously. The Lead in 2 NJ towns, in this year's small pool of results, exceeded levels in Flint, MI. It is an abomination for this to be happening and for there to not be a public outcry. It is the responsibility of the Governor and Legislature, together with municipalities, to treat the Lead crisis as a public health concern. The answers that are put out there—that encourage a 'do it yourself' approach are very concerning. Telling people to 'run the water for a while,' as if that is guaranteed to keep their children safe is no kind of an answer.

NJ needs to immediately distribute and assist in installing Lead filters in every home in NJ that was built before 1987. The lead solder is corroding in those homes and things will only get worse. Also, NJ needs to utilize its public bank to help municipalities with high lead levels in their pipes—street side—to remove and replace those pipes. Finally, school buildings should be a first priority for public-bank funding for new water lines. The assessment from a couple of years ago showed that hundreds of New Jersey schools had elevated lead levels. It is unacceptable for kids to be getting poisoned while at school because the state has been negligent to raise the banner of concern about lead.

A Kaper-Dale administration will demand the DEP carry out more rigorous testing of homes and schools than is currently required. And, if a problem is found—action plans for remediation, and filtration, will be demanded. Public education campaigns about Lead that are forgotten, while the problem remains, are just not sufficient solutions.

Finally, the finding that 25% of kids have lead in their systems is terrifying. In the same way we test towns for lead, we should test children, by municipality, for lead. One wonders if towns would be as dismissive of the data if they were assessing kid lead-levels, and finding those levels elevated, rather than only assessing lead levels in buildings.