

2019: The Year to Tackle Newark's Lead Crisis

Lead Levels in Newark Kids Up for First Time Since 2011

By Peter Chen, ACNJ Policy Counsel

January 09, 2019



Lead exposure continues to endanger Newark children, but recent developments present an opportunity to develop a permanent plan to eliminate and control the lead found in Newark's homes, infrastructure and environment.

Lead has reentered the spotlight and new data reveals continued risks for Newark kids:

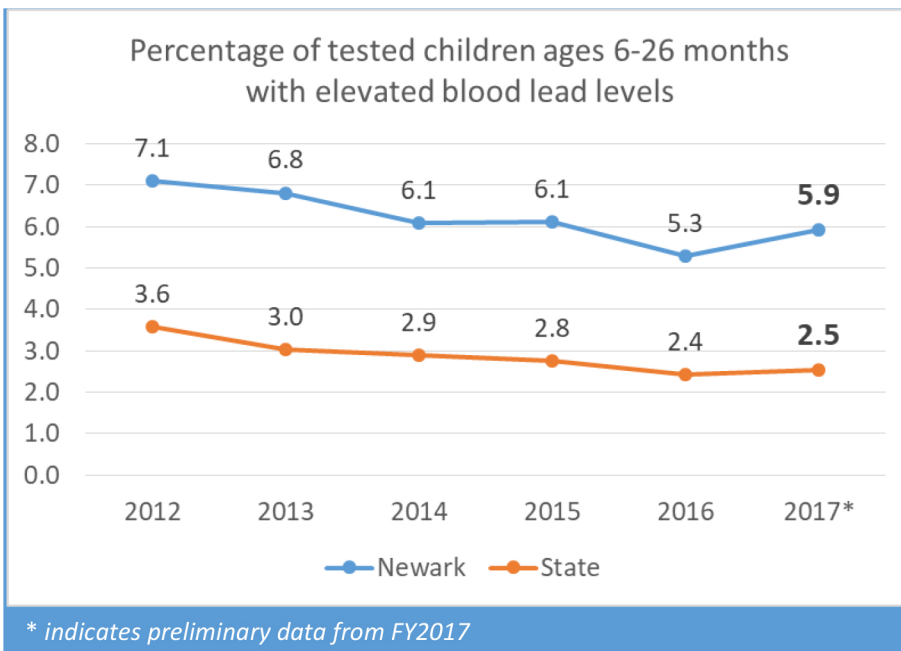
- More than 2 in 5 sampled homes had lead levels in their tap water above EPA action levels.
- The percentage of children with high lead levels increased, after years of improvement.

As we begin 2019, this should be the year that the city of Newark and the state of New Jersey create a comprehensive solution to eliminate lead exposure for children once and for all.

Data Update: Lead Levels in Kids Up for First Time Since 2011

In March 2018, ACNJ released a [Newark Kids Count report](#) with a special section on lead exposure, since Newark children have a heightened lead exposure risk. The report showed continued high percentages of children being exposed to lead, as well as a lack of awareness among residents of programs designed to reduce lead exposure.

Newly available data show that heightened lead exposure risk persists for children in Newark. After years of trending downwards, the rate of children ages 6 to 26 months with elevated lead levels increased in the city, from 5.3 percent of tested children in 2016 to 5.9 percent in preliminary data from 2017, while the state rate remained largely flat between 2016 and 2017.



Elevated lead levels are defined as 5 micrograms or more of lead for every deciliter of a child's blood, but there is no safe level of lead for children.

The rate also went up for children age 6 years and under, from 4.7 percent in 2016 to 5.2 percent in 2017. This contrasts with the state exposure rate, which remained roughly flat for children age 6 and under.

New Jersey has a universal screening mandate at 12 and 24 months old, since young children are most vulnerable to the developmental harm caused by lead exposure.

Although there is no information on the cause of the increase, the shift is cause for concern after years of declining rates of lead-exposed children.

Recent Development: Water Exposure Risks

Although lead paint and dust are traditionally the main exposure risk for young children, tap water can also be a risk in old housing.

In 2018, tap water in Newark was found to have unsafe levels of lead. Of the 240 tap water samples tested in Newark in the second half of 2018, **more than 2 in 5 (43 percent) tested above the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) action level for lead of 15 parts per billion (ppb)**. Results can be found on the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's [Water Watch page for Newark](#). To enforce the rule, large water systems in New Jersey are required to sample water in six-month intervals.

The EPA action level is the level for *enforcement*, not safety. There is no safe level of lead in water. Instead, when 10 percent or more of taps tested are above the EPA action level, the water system is considered out of compliance with the EPA Lead and Copper rule, requiring investigation and remediation if necessary. For a home, however, the only safe level of lead in water is 0.

recommending that pregnant women and all children starting at 3 months old be tested for lead, even if they had been previously tested.

For more information on the City's programs to reduce lead exposure through water, please visit newarklead serviceline.com.

What's Next: Getting the Lead Out of Newark

With the spotlight on Newark's lead issues, 2019 represents an opportunity for the city and state to eliminate future lead hazards for Newark's kids. Although the City of Newark already has some programs to address lead in homes and water, ACNJ's March 2018 report detailed the low awareness of these programs to many residents.

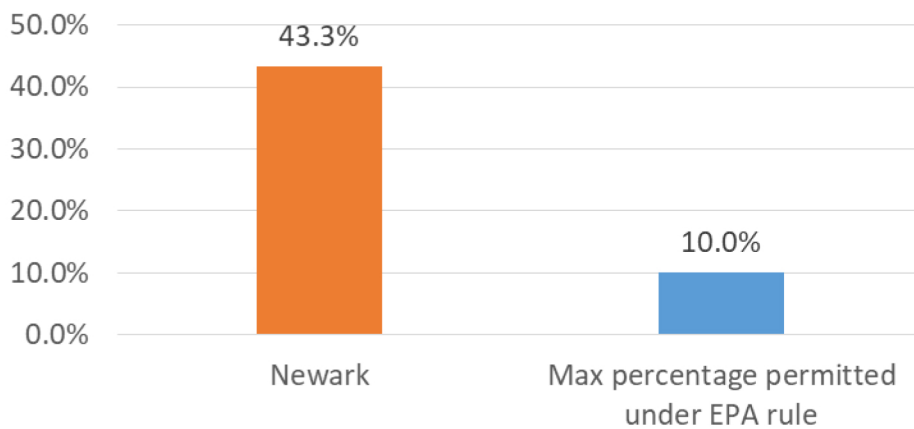
A comprehensive plan to eliminate lead exposure in Newark will require extensive cross-sector and cross-

department collaboration, data collection and analysis, stronger enforcement of lead inspection and lead-safe housing laws, and large-scale public and community engagement efforts.

It is never too early to take precautions to protect children from lead. Even low levels of lead can have lifelong effects on children's brain development, and these effects cannot be reversed. Healthy child development is a core part of ACNJ's [Right from the Start NJ and Think Babies campaign](#). With a comprehensive approach, we can ensure that all

children in Newark grow up lead-free.

Jul-Dec 2018 Percentage of Water Samples Above 15 ppb



Newark's lead levels have exceeded the EPA action level during each testing since the first half of 2017. The EPA requires water systems to add certain ingredients called "corrosion controls" to limit the amount of lead that mixes into tap water from lead pipes and faucets. In 2018, [Newark's investigation revealed](#) the failure of its corrosion controls in roughly half the city's water. This led the city to:

- distribute water filters certified to reduce lead to thousands of residents;
- ramp up enrollment in its lead pipe replacement program;
- and send a letter to doctors and families

Sources:

NJ Department of Health provided the preliminary 2017 data in a special data request from November 30, 2018. Data for 2016 and prior years are available on the Department of Health website: <https://www.state.nj.us/health/childhoodlead/data.shtml>

NJ Department of Environmental Protection publishes water system testing data on its Drinking Water Watch website (https://www9.state.nj.us/DEP_WaterWatch_public/). Newark data for lead testing is available here: https://www9.state.nj.us/DEP_WaterWatch_public/JSP/PBCUSummary.jsp?tinwsys=127 Data was retrieved on January 8, 2019.