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To: Local and Tribal Health Departments

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**New CDC Blood Lead Reference Value of 3.5 Micrograms per Deciliter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ ) for Children**

**Key Points:**

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lowered the blood lead reference value (BLRV) for children to 3.5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$  in October 2021.
- The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) requirements for local health departments (LHDs) have not changed at this time; however, DHS is now encouraging LHDs to lower their response level to 3.5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ .

On October 28, 2021, the CDC adopted a new blood lead reference value (BLRV) of 3.5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$  for children.

The CDC BLRV is established to correspond to the 97.5th percentile of blood lead levels (BLL) among children ages 1–5 years from the two most recent cycles of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Based on recent NHANES data (2015-2018), the CDC lowered their BLRV from 5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$  to 3.5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ . While the BLRV is not health-based and is not a regulatory standard, this value is used to guide public health and medical interventions for children with the highest blood lead levels.

Due to the change in the BLRV, DHS is working to reconcile this new value with references in state statute, administrative code, and DHS program policies. While DHS requirements and Medicaid reimbursement policy for LHDs have not changed at this time, DHS is now encouraging LHDs to lower their response level to 3.5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ . For CDC recommended actions, please see the [Health Care Guidance for Lead-Poisoned Children](#) on the DHS website.

The revised BLRV will significantly increase the number of children who will benefit from public health intervention. In 2019, a total of 7,119 Wisconsin children under age 6 had a BLL at or above 3.5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ . For comparison, 3,111 children had a BLL at or above the previous BLRV of 5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ .

There is no safe level of lead in the blood of children; even low levels of lead exposure can damage the brain and nervous system, slow growth and development, and result in learning and behavior problems. The updated BLRV empowers Wisconsin's public health and medical community to take earlier action to identify and mitigate lead exposures among children.

For more information contact the [Wisconsin Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program](#).