

NEWS RELEASE

November 1, 2010

For immediate release

For more information, contact: *Tabi Prochazka or Kelly Dean*, 308-487-3600 or 866-701-7173

Many children living in the Panhandle have blood levels high enough to cause significant damage to their health, estimates the Panhandle Public Health District based on data from a 2001-2005 state survey. Long-term exposure to even low levels of lead can cause irreversible learning difficulties, behavioral problems, and delayed neurological and physical development.

Panhandle Public Health District Nurse Kelly Dean said it is especially important to have children checked at one and two years of age. "Children at this age are more likely to be exposed to the risk factors described above and are especially susceptible to its toxic effects," Dean said. "Most commonly, lead dust gets on children's hands and toys and then into their bodies through normal hand-to-mouth activity.

"Major sources of lead exposure among U.S. children are lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust found in deteriorating buildings," Tabi Prochazka, PPHD Environmental Health Coordinator said. "Although lead was banned from residential use in 1978, it remains a hazard in homes built before that time."

"The older the home," Prochazka said, "the more likely it is to contain lead-based paint and to have a higher concentration of lead in the paint." Other sources of lead include soil and dust, drinking water and parent's occupations and hobbies such as hunting, fishing, auto repair, art and gardening.

Despite the continued presence of lead in the environment, lead poisoning is entirely preventable. Parents can reduce a child's exposure to lead in many ways. Here are some simple things you can do to help protect your family:

- Ask your doctor to test your young children for lead even if they seem healthy, as there often are no signs or symptoms present.
- Report chipped or cracked paint to your landlord if you live in an older home built before 1978.
- Make sure your children do not chew on painted surfaces, such as toys or windowsills.
- Keep the area where your children play as dust free and clean as possible.
- Learn about and avoid toys that contain lead.

For additional information about lead poisoning, visit www.pphd.org. The purpose of the Panhandle Public Health District is to educate the region it serves about the prevention of epidemics, spread of contagious diseases, injury, illness and disability. The district is charged with promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors. They promote the quality and accessibility of health services and protection against environmental hazards. Through education, protection and promotion of these issues, the Panhandle Public Health District believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.