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*From the Baltimore Sun*

## Lead testing reveals progress

### Number of Md. youth with elevated levels continues to shrink

By Sumathi Reddy  
Sun reporter

July 31, 2006



The number of Maryland children with elevated lead levels continues to drop, according to a recently released study, but health officials warn that more work must be done to reach their goal of eliminating childhood lead poisoning by 2010.

Of 99,148 children tested for lead exposure in the state last year, 1.3 percent showed elevated lead levels, compared with 1.7 percent in 2004, according to a report released last week by the [Maryland Department of the Environment](#).

In Baltimore City, where most of the state's lead poisoning cases are concentrated, there was a 28 percent decrease in the number of children whose tests turned up 10 or more micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood in 2005, compared with the previous year.

There was a 52 percent drop in the number of city children whose blood tests showed 20 or more micrograms of lead during the same period.

"I think it's definitely a sign of continued progress for the city, but we still have a lot of kids getting poisoned," said city Health Commissioner Dr. Joshua Sharfstein. "So it's not 'mission accomplished.'"

Six counties showed increases in the number of children with elevated levels of lead, but most of the increases were small, said Alvin Bowles, program manager for the lead poisoning and prevention program for the [Maryland Department of the Environment](#).

Baltimore County had 110 cases, two more than last year.

Bowles said the statewide figure has been decreasing since 1993. In Baltimore City the figures have been steadily decreasing since 1997, he said.

"The trend that we've had for the last 10 to 12 years is continuing," said Bowles. "We're finding that less children are having elevated blood levels, and that's good news."

Lead poisoning is caused when children ingest lead in paint chips, dust or water. Children exposed to large level of lead can suffer development problems and death.

The report attributes the drop to increased enforcement of Maryland's Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing law, "increased awareness by parents and property owners of the hazards of lead exposure and improved maintenance of rental housing."

Of Baltimore's 53,626 children under the age of 6, 17,943 were tested last year. Madeleine Shea, the Health Department's assistant commissioner for healthy homes, said she was happy with the progress the city has made battling lead poisoning but was disappointed with a small dip in the testing numbers.

About 1,000 fewer city children were tested in 2005 than the year before. Shea is responsible for reducing childhood lead poisoning, asthma and injuries in the home.

Sharfstein said the city is working to shift resources to prevention. "Our hope is to identify the places that families are moving into and getting improvements in those places before kids are exposed to lead," he said.

Ruth Ann Norton, director of the Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning in Baltimore, said she was happy with the continued progress but cautioned that funding and enforcement must continue.

"The question is now, 'How do we get all of us to stay focused so we can finish this?'" she said.

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