



GET THE LEAD OUT, WILKINSBURG:

Study identifies lead hazards in community,
recommendations for action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Get the Lead Out, Pittsburgh

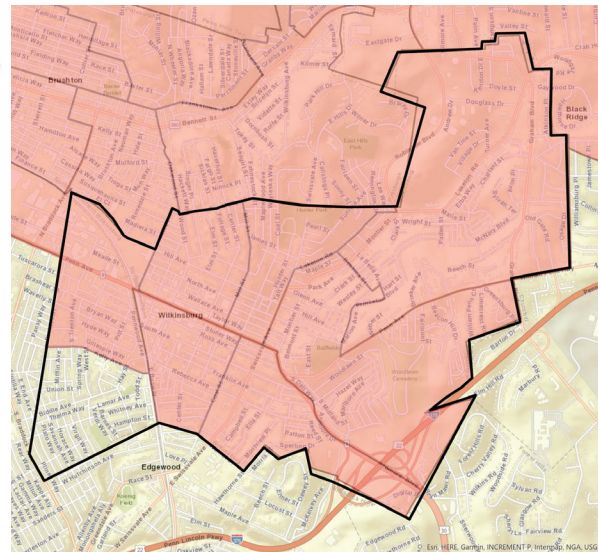
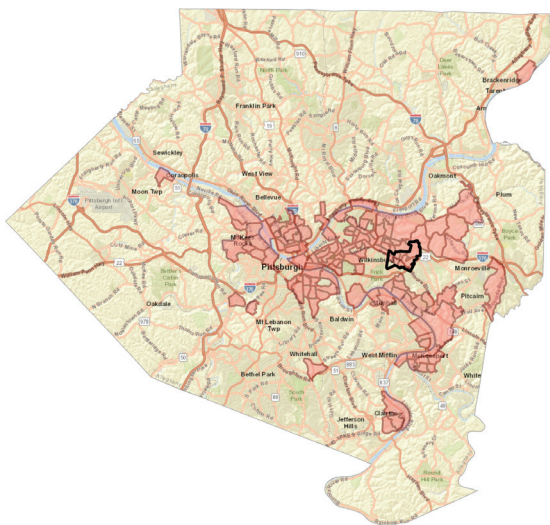
APRIL 2021

LEAD: HARMFUL AND PERVASIVE

“We now know that there is no safe level of blood lead concentration for children,” stated the American Academy of Pediatrics. “And the best ‘treatment’ for lead poisoning is to prevent any exposure before it happens.”

Children, especially those under six years of age, are most vulnerable and at risk from lead exposure due to their rapid growth and development. Lead poisoning causes neurodevelopmental delays and impacts (behavior and learning problems, lower IQ, ADD, ADHD), hearing problems and speech delays, anemia, weight loss, fatigue and seizures.

According to the Allegheny County Health Department, from 2015-2018 there were 929 children under age 6 who were screened for lead poisoning in the Borough. Of that, 58 children (6.24%) had a confirmed elevated blood lead level (EBLL). Comparatively, an average of 1.84% of children under age 6 tested in Allegheny County had confirmed EBLLs.



Wilkesburg is centrally located and houses a higher concentration of Environmental Justice communities. This concentration is striking, especially considering only about 30% of the census tracts in the county are designated as EJ areas. These are also the areas in which lead poisoning among children is more prevalent.

Data illustrates that lead poisoning disproportionately impacts communities of color, specifically in Allegheny County and the Borough of Wilkesburg. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) summarizes this cumulative burden: “Communities of color are at a higher risk of lead exposure because they may not have access to safe, affordable housing or face discrimination when trying to find a safe, healthy place to live. This is called housing inequity, and it puts some children, such as non-Hispanic Black persons, at a greater risk of exposure to lead.”

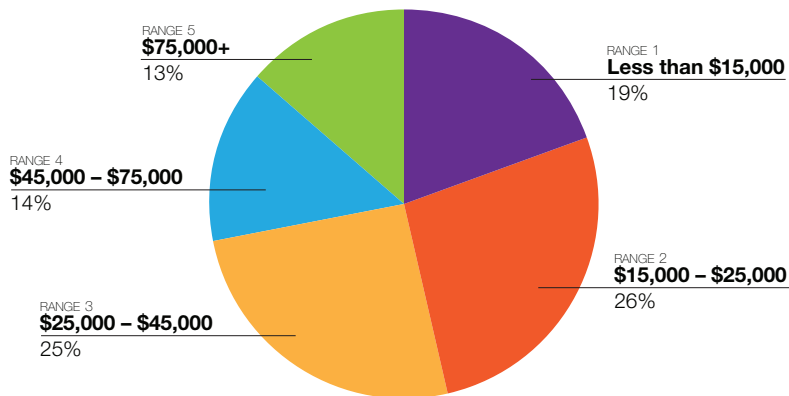
“Get the Lead Out, Pittsburgh,” a public awareness campaign designed to shine a light on lead poisoning in Allegheny County, help families affected by lead poisoning and enact changes to make our community safer, recruited 65 residents in the Fall of 2019 through community events, door-to-door canvassing, community networks and social media.

WILKINSBURG: THE STUDY ON LEAD HAZARDS

Each participant volunteered to have a full lead risk assessment of their home completed, which included testing for lead in soil, water, paint and dust. Sampling was completed by certified lead inspectors and risk assessors. Of the 65 respondents,

- 29% noted having children under 6 in the home;
- 10% of respondents noted that they were aware of someone in their household having an EBLL.
- Of participants, 52% were renters; 48% were homeowners.
- Length of occupancy ranged from 0.5 years to 55 years and residents averaged 11.3 years of occupancy.
- When asked whether or not they had the intention to relocate, 91% said no.
- Most (78%) said they were unsure whether or not there was any lead present in the home.

Income Ranges of Respondents



RESULTS: IN THE HANDS OF WILKINSBURG RESIDENTS

Individual participants were notified of their results and provided with appropriate guidance on how to protect themselves from lead exposure. In addition, participants were invited to a community meeting held by the GTLO campaign, where they could ask specific questions regarding their results. At the community meeting, attendees received a home cleaning kit and water pitcher certified to remove lead from drinking water.

SUMMARY: FINDINGS

Table ES-1: Summary of sampling for lead in 65 households in Wilkinsburg, PA in the fall of 2019.

Source	Households sampled	Positive samples	Percentage of homes with at least one sample exceeding action levels
Paint	65	51	78%
Dust	65	39	55%
Water	64	26	2%
Soil	19	19	42%

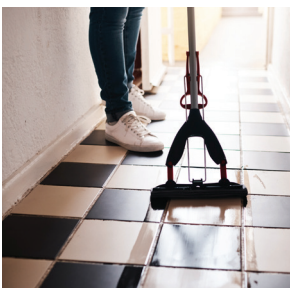
RECOMMENDATIONS: POLICY

Preventing exposure to lead is key to solving lead poisoning. Primary prevention strategies largely include policies and procedures that require:

- Identification and remediation of lead hazards in the built environment
- Safe (wet) demolition, renovation, repair and painting practices
- Replacement of lead water service lines

A number of policies may be implemented as tools to protect community members from lead exposure. The Borough of Wilkinsburg has some of these tools in place, putting them among a small group of Allegheny County municipalities with a promising opportunity to integrate lead safety into their existing codes, programs and requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS: CERTIFICATES OF OCCUPANCY



Before new tenants are permitted to move into a Wilkinsburg rental property, the owner of the property must obtain an occupancy permit that is conditioned on a code inspection and correct any cited violations. The inspection carried out by code enforcement staff includes a visual assessment for interior and exterior peeling paint per the International Property Maintenance Code, which ensures deteriorated paint, that may or may not be lead-based, will be cited and remediated. Testing for other lead hazards, such as lead-contaminated dust, is not conducted as part of these inspections currently.

Due to household dust being the leading source of childhood lead poisoning, it is recommended that Wilkinsburg explore the integration of dust wipe sampling into the inspection protocol for occupancy permits.

RECOMMENDATIONS: DEMOLITION REQUIREMENTS

It is recommended that the Borough consider a first step towards this model procedure: the wet-wet-wet method. This method includes wetting structures built before 1978 with water before, during and after the demolition in order to reduce lead dust falling in the surrounding area. A requirement for this protocol could be included in the specifications for public demolitions and proof of this method could be required before issuing private demolition permits.

RECOMMENDATIONS: WATER

The Borough of Wilkinsburg is encouraged to pass a resolution urging water systems serving their residents to place a moratorium on partial lead service line replacements, as well as partner with stakeholders to support applications for funding, such as the PennVest grants that will be available to water systems across Pennsylvania in 2021 for full-service line replacements.



GET THE LEAD OUT, WILKINSBURG

This project demonstrates that lead is present in multiple sources, including paint, dust, soil and water in properties and homes in the Borough of Wilkinsburg. We look forward to collaborating with Borough leadership on the recommendations put forward in the full report and working together to create a lead-safe community for all Wilkinsburg residents.

Learn more, get help, take action: gettheleadoutpgh.org