

Children's Wisconsin partners with City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee Public Schools and other community organizations to help address lead crisis

In January 2025, the City of Milwaukee Health Department identified lead-based paint and dust hazards in several Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) while investigating a limited number of cases of lead poisoning amongst MPS students. MPS and the City of Milwaukee Health Department developed an action plan to address the hazards at all MPS schools to ensure student safety and health.

The City of Milwaukee Health Department partnered with community organizations to offer free lead screenings for children at no cost to families. Children's Wisconsin supported 3 school-based testing events where 300+ children were tested for lead poisoning. Children's Wisconsin offered best practice guidance and skilled health professionals. Test results were shared with public health departments and the identified primary care provider. If a child didn't have a primary care provider, resources were available to connect them to a medical home. For children whose capillary blood lead levels were high, technicians were available to take a venous sample to confirm any lead poisoning. If they had elevated blood lead levels, families were connected to additional resources and any next level of care needed. Children's Wisconsin offered additional community-based testing for a limited time at the Children's Wisconsin Next Door Clinic on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Thankfully, school-based testing clinics had very low positivity rates with none reaching public health intervention levels. Several families expressed how thankful they were to have access to this care to help bring peace of mind for their child's health.

Since 2023, in partnership with the MacCanon Brown Homeless Sanctuary and the Coalition on Lead Emergency (COLE), Children's Wisconsin helps test children for lead poisoning. The MacCanon Brown Homeless Sanctuary is a multi-resource center that helps meet community members' essential needs and provides connection to community and supportive resources. COLE is a community education and advocacy organization housed within Hephatha Lutheran Church. Both organizations serve those living in the 53206 zip code — where Milwaukee's lead poisoning crisis is particularly serious. Approximately 500 kids have been tested through these regular events.

As a leading provider of health care for children in Milwaukee and Wisconsin, Children's Wisconsin understands firsthand the severe effects lead poisoning can have on a child's well-being. Wisconsin is ranked among the top states for highest percentages of children with elevated blood levels. Children's Wisconsin is working across the continuum, providing preventive health education, screening and testing in Primary Care, and our Centralized Lead Care Management program working to close care gaps and improve care coordination for kids with lead poisoning. A nurse case manager and care coordination assistant perform outreach, scheduling, transportation coordination, and follow-up with families, public health workers and primary care providers. As a result of these efforts, our patients and families with known lead poisoning are receiving consistent care coordination including better adherence to interval lab monitoring, access to venous testing options including in-clinic venous draws in some of our locations. Consistent and early blood lead level testing remains the best way to identify children experiencing lead poisoning.