
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE



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For additional information contact:

Steve Kelso at (616) 632-7274 or Steve.Kelso@kentcountymi.gov

Kent County Board Chair and Grand Rapids Mayor Co-sponsor Kent County Lead Action Team
Stakeholder team will work to end child lead exposure in Kent County

GRAND RAPIDS, MI. (February 25, 2020) Kent County Board of Commissioners Chair Mandy Bolter and Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss will co-sponsor a new initiative aimed at ending child lead exposure in Kent County. The pair announced the formation of the Kent County Lead Action Team (LAT) at a news conference held at the Kent County Health Department (KCHD) this afternoon.

“Mayor Bliss and I are co-sponsoring the Lead Action Team for one reason: One child exposed to lead in our community is one child too many,” Bolter said. “While much has been accomplished, we recognize that there is much yet to be done. Our community has focused on this issue for years, and there are some great resources available to our residents. But we need to do a better job coordinating those resources and holding each other accountable. That’s what this Lead Action Team is all about.”

Bolter highlighted the community’s long history of public-private partnerships and programs aimed at tackling the problem of lead in area homes and neighborhoods. Through these partnerships and improved policy, our region has seen the rate of elevated blood lead levels in children decrease dramatically over the past decade.

“It’s critically important that we keep the momentum going because lead can compromise the abilities of children in our community to learn and properly develop,” Bliss said. “Lead poisoning and exposure have a long-term negative impact on our entire community. With early detection and intervention, we can positively change the entire trajectory of a child’s life.”

Lead is toxic to everyone. There is no “safe” level of lead in children. The greatest risk for lifelong complications occurs in unborn babies and young children who absorb lead more easily. Exposure to lead can cause damage to the brain and nervous system, slowed growth and development, hearing and vision problems, and learning and behavior problems. Historically, the biggest risk for Kent County’s children has been lead-contaminated dust from paint found in homes built before 1978. When the old paint chips, flakes or peels, lead-contaminated dust can get on hands, toys, clothes, furniture and other items around the house. Breathing in or swallowing lead-contaminated dust can cause many health problems.

The LAT will focus on specific goals and priorities and take concrete steps to advance and complete those goals.

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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“The areas we have identified include proper case management for children who have elevated blood lead levels, environmental health protection through risk reduction and social supports for those who are impacted,” said Dr. Adam London, Administrative Health Officer at KCHD. “The success of this collaboration will be measured primarily by the continued downward progression of elevated blood lead levels in all areas of the county.”

The community will be able to follow the LAT’s progress using an online Kent County dashboard at <https://www.accesskent.com/Stories/lead-action-team.htm>. The dashboard uses regularly updated data compiled by KCHD epidemiologists and sanitarians to track individual measures and the progress toward each goal.

The LAT steering committee and workgroups members will include a representation of community members with lived experience and subject matter experts from throughout the county. Many of these partners such as the Healthy Homes Coalition have been instrumental in achieving the successes of the past. Their collective knowledge will be crucial in completing the goals set forth by the LAT.

For more information about the health impacts of lead, how to prevent lead poisoning and where to find help visit <https://dontplayaround.org/>.

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