

Blood Tests for Head Start Children

Lead Poisoning – Dangerously high levels of lead are found in 1 out of about 22 children. Without early treatment, accumulated lead can cause damage to the brain and nervous system, resulting in behavior problems, headaches, hearing problems, learning problems and impaired growth. Young children tend to accumulate high levels of lead because they often put things containing lead into their mouths and because their growing bodies absorb more lead. A simple blood test will check for lead levels; even children who appear healthy may have high levels of lead. Common sources of lead include:

Paint in homes built before 1978 Soil contaminated with gasoline
Antique furniture, toys or dishes Drinking water from lead pipes
Contact with adults who work with lead: construction, auto body repair, batteries, welding, casting ammunition etc.

The state Medicaid program (and therefore Head Start programs) requires a screening blood lead test be performed for children at 12 and 24 months of age. Children between the ages of 36 and 72 months must receive a blood test if they have not been previously tested for lead poisoning. Please talk to your child's doctor about a blood test for lead poisoning.

Anemia – Iron is a necessary mineral for body function and good health. Every red blood cell in the body contains iron in its hemoglobin, the pigment that carries oxygen to the tissues from the lungs. Iron deficiency can also cause the body to absorb more lead, which increases the risk of lead poisoning in children. The combination of iron deficiency anemia and lead poisoning can make children very ill and can put them at risk for learning and behavioral problems. Many children with anemia don't show any symptoms because the body's iron stores are depleted slowly. As the anemia progresses, symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, pale skin and mucous membranes, irritability, decreased appetite and dizziness are seen. A blood test is usually needed to diagnose iron deficiency anemia. The simple blood test may reveal low hemoglobin levels and low hematocrit (the percentage of the blood made up of red blood cells). Head Start Performance Standards recommend every child receives a yearly blood test for anemia. Please talk to your doctor about this simple blood test for iron deficiency anemia.