

# Childhood Lead Exposure in Massachusetts

## Impact at a Glance

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health enforces the state's laws on lead exposure through the prevention, screening, diagnosis and treatment of childhood lead poisoning, including elimination of the sources of poisoning.

While substantial gains have been made to mitigate its harmful effects, **lead exposure remains a significant health risk for children across Massachusetts.**

### Health Effects of Lead Exposure

There is no safe level of lead exposure and **childhood exposure to even low levels can cause severe and irreversible effects**, including:



**Damage to the brain and nervous system**



**Slowed growth and development, hearing and speech problems**



**Learning and behavior problems**

### Lead in Homes by the Numbers

Lead-based paints were banned in homes in 1978.



**71%** of Massachusetts housing was built before 1978



**18%** of pre-1978 housing has been inspected for lead hazards



**10%** of pre-1978 housing has been confirmed lead safe



### Race and Income Inequities

Lead is a critical health equity issue. **Lead exposure in Massachusetts disproportionately impacts low income communities and communities of color.**

Historical housing policies that have perpetuated segregation and limited opportunity for home ownership, such as redlining, have led to the increase in risk factors for lead poisoning in black communities, including older housing stock, dilapidated housing and fewer owner-occupied housing units.

# 3,555

Massachusetts children tested with elevated blood lead levels in 2017.

### Lead Paint is the Primary Hazard



When children are identified as lead poisoned, **most often the source of the exposure is through ingestion of dust or soil contaminated by loose or**

**deteriorated lead paint** or lead paint that was disturbed by unsafe renovation work in their homes.

Children living in low income communities are over

**3x** more likely to have elevated blood lead levels

than children living in high income communities.

Black children are nearly

**2.5x** more likely to have lead poisoning

than white children.



For more information on DPH's Childhood Lead Prevention Program, visit: [www.mass.gov/orgs/childhood-lead-poisoning-prevention-program](http://www.mass.gov/orgs/childhood-lead-poisoning-prevention-program)