Environmental Health Coalition Applauds Centers for Disease Control for Acknowledging There is No Safe Lead Level

New standards will help low-income families in San Diego receive appropriate services to make their homes lead-safe

SAN DIEGO, May 17, 2012 – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced yesterday that it will lower the level of blood-lead poisoning that requires action in children under the age of five. Environmental Health Coalition (EHC), a San Diego-based organization that fights to improve the health and environment for low-income communities in the San Diego/Tijuana region, applauds this move, which will empower low-income families to make their housing safe from lead.

“Lead poisoning is the number one environmental hazard threatening children throughout the United States, but it’s also one of the most preventable hazards if we can eliminate the exposure,” said Leticia Ayala, Environmental Health Coalition’s associate director in charge of the Healthy Kids Campaign. “EHC estimates, based on 2010 San Diego County data, that as many as 1,600 children, up from 204, could now be defined as lead poisoned.”

For several years, EHC has worked with a network of organizations across the country asking CDC to lower the levels of blood-lead poisoning that it considers safe in children. Today’s announcement redefines CDC’s “level of concern,” unchanged since 1991, from a blood-lead level of 10 micrograms per deciliter to five micrograms per deciliter. The CDC based the new value on population blood-lead levels to focus action on those children with the highest blood-lead levels. This change will increase the number of children requiring follow-up services from less than 100,000 to 450,000 nationwide.

Research shows that even low levels of lead poisoning can cause hyperactivity, aggressive behavior, learning disabilities, lowered IQ, speech delay and hearing impairment. High levels of lead can cause severe mental disabilities, convulsions, coma or even death.

“The most common source of lead is lead-based paint and lead-contaminated house dust in homes built before 1978, the year lead was banned in residential paint,” said Ayala. “In the City of San Diego, this type of pollution adversely affects low-income families who can’t afford to live in new housing or upgrade their current housing. They cannot afford to vote with their feet; they are afraid to complain for fear of being evicted.”

In the City of San Diego, families with children who might live in housing with lead-based paint should contact Environmental Health Coalition to learn more about lead-poisoning risks, free testing for children and lead-hazard removal programs. EHC partners with the San Diego Housing Commission’s “Home Safe Home” program to identify homes built before 1979 that are eligible for lead-based paint remediation.

Today’s announcement comes despite the fact that the federal government recently cut the program’s budget by more than 90 percent, leading to staff reductions from 26 to six full-time employees. The State of California continues to have funding to...
protect children from lead. The State of California’s Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Act of 1991 requires the Department of Health Services to ensure case management is provided to all lead-poisoned children. Fee assessed on industries the emit lead into environment fund DHS’s lead program including case management and identification of lead source. Health & Safety Code SS105305 and 105310.

Interested community members can call EHC at (619) 474-0220 ext. 141 to learn if their home qualifies for lead-based paint remediation. For more information about EHC, please visit http://www.environmentalhealth.org.

For more information on CDC’s announcement, please visit: http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/ACCLPP/activities.htm

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