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Quick blood lead level results for young children

Parents will soon be able to get young children's lead levels tested at primary health care providers and at the North West Hospital and Health Service (NWHHS), thanks to funding for lead testing machines.

The Office of the Chief Medical Officer has funded four machines, valued at approximately \$4,000 each. Kerri O'Connor, NWHHS Nurse Unit Manager for Maternal Child and Youth Health, says the new testing method is much quicker and less invasive than a venous blood test.

"The point of care finger prick test with these machines will only take a few minutes, and the results will be available in 15 minutes. We are aiming to offer the test at the same time as giving immunisations – at age 6 months, 12 months, 18 months and 3 ½ years, but children can still be tested up to five years in age," Ms O'Connor said.

The four machines will be used by Gidgee Healing, Sonic Health Plus- Mount Isa GP Super Clinic, and the NWHHS Child Health Services and Paediatric Outpatients. The lead level testing will be available at the beginning of October.

A year's funding has also been granted for the test strips, which cost \$15 for each patient.

Ms O'Connor said the tests are reliable and have been used in Broken Hill for the past 20 years. She is hoping it will increase the amount of blood testing for lead in young children.

"There has been a significant drop in children being tested for blood lead levels; we have very low testing rates at the moment.

"We want parents to get their children tested, if the lead level results are high, we refer the patient to a GP, and we look at their environment.

"We live in a lead-rich environment, and kids eat dirt – that's just a fact of life – but there are changes to the environment that can be made, such as damping down dirt and dust in the yards, ensuring grass is grown to cover the dirt, and carrying out the measures advocated by The Lead Alliance: healthy eating, washing hands before eating and after handling pets, keeping pets outside, wet wiping surfaces in the home."

Ms O'Connor said The Lead Alliance would be producing a poster about the new blood lead testing machines.

Media statement



The Chair of The Lead Alliance, Robbie Katter, said the Alliance was thrilled to have the extra testing available in Mount Isa.

“We’ll be able to get more children tested, the test is not as invasive as the venous testing, and the results are immediately available.

“In the meantime it’s still very important for families to keep sticking to those positive messages such as the wet wipe message: wiping down all household surfaces regularly with a wet cloth and wet mopping hard floors; washing hands before eating, after playing outside and after handling pets.

“The eat well message is to reinforce the fact that good nutrition reduces the absorption of lead from the stomach into the blood stream, especially important with children,” Mr Katter said.

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