

September 29, 2026

For Immediate Release

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New Lead-Based Paint Program Helps Protect Local Children

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) is excited to announce a new Lead Hazard Reduction program funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This program will help eligible families identify and reduce lead-based paint hazards in their homes.

Lead-based paint was commonly used in homes before it was banned for residential use in 1978. Many older homes may still have lead-based paint. When this paint chips, peels, or is disturbed during repairs or remodeling, it can create lead-contaminated dust and paint chips. Young children can be exposed when they get lead dust on their hands, toys, or other objects and then put them in their mouths or when they breathe in lead dust. Lead may also be found in contaminated soil, drinking water, and some household or consumer products.

Who May Qualify?

Families may qualify for the Lead Hazard Reduction program if:

- The home was built before 1978.
- A child under 6 years old lives in the home or visits the home often.
- The household income is at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

SWNPHD can work with eligible families to identify lead-based paint hazards in the home and determine what work may be needed to remove it. Removal or other construction work is covered by the program and is done at no cost to the family.

Why Is Lead a Concern for Children?

Children under age 6 are at the greatest risk from lead exposure because their bodies and brains are still developing. Young children are also more likely to put their hands, toys, and other objects in their mouths, which can increase their risk of swallowing lead dust.

Even low levels of lead can affect a child's health and development. Lead exposure can affect a child's ability to learn, pay attention, and do well in school. Some effects of lead exposure are permanent. Many children with lead exposure do not have obvious symptoms, which is why blood lead testing is important for children who may be at risk.

Blood Lead Screening Is Available

A simple finger-poke blood test can help parents find out if a child has been exposed to lead. SWNPHD can provide blood lead screening for children under age 6, or your child's doctor can check for lead at their Well Child checkups. US Census data showed that there were 2,884 children eligible for lead testing in the health district in 2025, and only 154 children were tested.

There is no safe level of lead in a child's blood; however, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently uses a blood lead reference value of 3.5 micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$) to identify children who have high blood lead levels. This number is used to help determine when follow-up may be needed.

If a child or someone else living in the home has a blood lead level at or above 3.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, contact SWNPHD to learn more about available services and whether the home may qualify for a free lead risk assessment.

A Safe Home Starts with Knowing the Risk

Lead poisoning is preventable. Finding lead hazards early and safely addressing them can help protect children and give families peace of mind.

If your home was built before 1978, you have a child under age 6 who lives in or regularly visits the home, or you are concerned about possible lead exposure, contact Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department to learn more about blood lead screening and the Lead Hazard Reduction program.

More information may be found at swhealth.ne.gov or by calling SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. Information can also be found on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

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