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To: Wisconsin Healthcare Providers, Pediatricians, Nurse Practitioners, Local Health Departments, and Tribal Health Agencies

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## New Recommendation for Universal Blood Lead Testing of Children

### PLEASE DISTRIBUTE WIDELY

#### Key points for universal blood lead testing:

- Test all children for blood lead levels at age 1 and at age 2.
- Test any children ages 3 to 5 at least once who have never been tested for lead.
- Use venous blood draw (preferred) or capillary (finger stick) methods.
- Report the results: All blood lead test results are reportable to the State under [Wis. Admin. Code ch. DHS 181](#).

#### Background

Starting January 2024, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) recommends blood lead testing of **all children twice by age two**. Under this new recommendation, all pediatric providers should test their patients for blood lead levels once at age 1 and at again at age 2. In addition, providers should test children who are between 3 and 5 years old who have never been tested.

#### Early detection equals early intervention

There is no safe level of lead in the blood of children and often there are no outward signs or symptoms that a child is lead poisoned until the child is older and it's too late to mitigate the effects of the earlier exposure. Even low levels of lead exposure can damage the brain and nervous system, cause slow growth and development, and result in learning and behavior problems. A **universal blood lead testing** approach empowers Wisconsin's public health and medical communities to take earlier action to identify and mitigate lead exposures among children.

#### Health equity

Although deteriorating lead-based paint in older homes remains the most common source of lead exposure for children in Wisconsin, the recent FDA applesauce recall serves as a reminder that non-paint sources can poison children. Universal testing is an equitable approach to determining childhood lead poisoning because it prevents missing a child who may have been excluded from testing based on a targeted approach. Furthermore, **universal blood lead testing** will improve overall testing rates that

have significantly declined in the past several years. The new recommendations are equivalent to blood lead testing requirements for children enrolled in Medicaid. **Please note that this does not change the blood lead testing requirements for children living in the City of Milwaukee.** The City of Milwaukee Health Department recommends that children living in the city are tested at least three times before the age of 3.

**Universal blood lead testing** is expected to increase the number of children identified with lead poisoning. The benefit of identifying a child with lead poisoning is that they can get connected to services to prevent further lead exposure and promote healthier child development.

For more information contact the Wisconsin Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at [DHSLeadPoisoningPrevention@dhs.wisconsin.gov](mailto:DHSLeadPoisoningPrevention@dhs.wisconsin.gov).