

PRESS RELEASE



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GOSHEN – The Elkhart County Health Department can't say whether efforts of the Girl Scouts and others were a determining factor or not, but they can tell you that identification of children with lead poisoning increased in the last year.

“The Elkhart County Health Department and the Lead Task Force have worked over the last few years to promote the importance of blood testing and our efforts have increased our rates. Yet without the help of partners in the community we cannot begin to fight the preventable health issue of lead poisoning,” states Linda Plummer, R.N. Supervisor and member of the Elkhart County Lead Task Force.

“The Girl Scout organization has been instrumental in helping to raise awareness of lead poisoning not only to the community, but also to the Girl Scouts and to their troop leaders. The Girl Scout organization is part of our Lead Task Force and this is the second year for the collaboration of the Elkhart County Health Department and the Girl Scouts for the national Make a Difference Day Lead Walk-About on Saturday, Oct. 27.

“Numbers of children who have tested positive have significantly increased due to the increase in the public awareness about lead poisoning by the media and with the recall of many toys, including those sold by Mattel,” Plummer continues.

“Also, more physicians are doing lead testing. In addition, we are doing more lead presentations with community agencies to increase education and awareness.

“Still, on average only about four percent of the population of concern (children age nine months through six years) are being tested. It is estimated that there are more than 20,000 children in Elkhart County under the age of seven. In 2006 1,431 lead tests were done compared to 1,107 from January 2007 to August, when 327 alone were done.” Plummer’s data also shows that 30 new cases of lead poisoning were diagnosed in 2006 and 28 new cases have been diagnosed since this January (eight in August). According to the data the Spanish population is being hit hard; 40% of the county’s lead poisoned children are Spanish.

Last year about 307 girls – who ranged in ages from 5 – 15 – in Indiana Lakeland council’s four county area distributed English/Spanish reading materials as part of their efforts in joining national Make a Difference Day. Girl Scouts and their troop leaders from Indiana Lakeland Council also gained a better understanding of the consequences of lead in their environment because of their efforts to distribute information to individuals living in at risk neighborhoods (houses built before 1978).

The girls did this walk-about in neighborhoods targeted by their county’s health departments.

Again the Girl Scouts will drop off literature at homes in their neighborhoods during their walk-about; but the program has a twist this year. In early October, before the Make a Difference Day effort Girl Scouts will take part in a hands on workshop to help them learn more about issues related to lead poisoning and to test items for lead. During this Girl Scout CSI-styled science workshop, girls age 6 – 14 will bring a toy, jewelry or other items from home they can test for lead content. Staff from the Elkhart County Health Department will lead this workshop to be at the First United Methodist Church in Goshen.

Girl Scouts will be reminded that lead in toys, paint and the environment can have long term effects on children that may cause learning disabilities, decreased growth, hyperactivity, impaired hearing and even brain damage or death. The girls also will learn that if discovered early enough through testing, these effects may be limited by reducing exposure to lead or by medical treatment.

Persons interested in learning more about the causes, testing and treatment of lead poisoning should contact Plummer at 574.523.2143. To learn more about the Girl Scouting and their community service efforts, check www.indianalakeland.org or call 574.533.8881 or 866.223.7740.