

NEWS RELEASE issued by THEC

2024 Children's Lead Levels Steady, Participation Rates Rising

November 29, 2024

Trail, BC - The 2024 blood lead testing clinic results for children aged six months to 36 months in Trail and Rivervale show an average blood lead level of **2.2 micrograms per decilitre**, similar to last year's finding. These results highlight the community's ongoing progress in managing lead exposure in an area with an operating lead smelter.

The Trail Area Health & Environment Program (THEP) is pleased to report a significant increase in community participation this year, marking a notable rebound after the pandemic-related decline. Cecilee Pitman, one of THEP's two public health nurses expressed her enthusiasm, saying:

"We work hard to encourage participation and we are thrilled to see an almost 20% increase since 2020 in our harder-to-reach neighbourhoods."

The Trail Area Health & Environment Committee (THEC) extends its gratitude to all the families who participated in the clinics. Monitoring blood lead levels is essential for tracking children's health progress and informing a range of programs to reduce exposure to lead in the community.

A Holistic Approach

THEP uses a holistic approach to support families to reduce children's blood lead levels while promoting many more health benefits. The program addresses lead exposure in the community from our air, soil, and built environments (e.g. homes and daycares) as well as encouraging residents to adopt healthy habits such as handwashing before eating, ensuring a nutritious iron rich diet, and keeping floors dust-free (to name a few). THEP builds strong connections with family groups in the community to foster relationships, share and ensure supports get to where they are needed.

Air Quality

THEP's Air Quality Program, delivered by Teck Trail Operations, works to reduce lead in airborne dust. Levels of lead in community air continue to meet the US Environmental Protection Agency standard (used in the absence of Canadian air quality objectives or standards), with the 2024 year-to-date average of 0.085 micrograms per cubic metre at Butler Park, similar to 2023.

Looking Ahead

The steady blood lead levels and increased participation this year reflect the collective effort and commitment by many for a healthy community. THEP partners remain dedicated to working alongside residents to achieve further improvements in children's health and the environment.

Quotes

Mayor Colleen Jones, City of Trail, and Chair of the Trail Area Health & Environment Committee expresses her gratitude, “I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all the families who continue to participate in the blood lead testing clinics. It’s wonderful to see an increasing number of children attending from across Trail and the surrounding areas. Your involvement is key to maintaining one of the most comprehensive monitoring programs in the world. The City of Trail is proud to be a partner of THEP for over three decades, working together to ensure the health and well-being of our community.”

Dr. Karin Goodison, Medical Health Officer, Interior Health says, “Trail’s blood lead monitoring program is a gold standard approach to monitor children’s exposure and guide remediation efforts with a focus on health. It is encouraging to see that blood lead levels for children in the Trail area remain similar to last year and that community participation is increasing.”

Matt Parrilla, General Manager at Teck Trail Operations says, “Teck Trail Operations remains committed to working with all THEP partners to reduce community exposure to lead. This includes the critical task of continuing to reduce lead in airborne dust in the community. Significant investments in the KIVCET furnace over the past two years will enable us to return to operational stability, and together with additional controls implemented as part of our Fugitive Dust Reduction Program, will provide the foundation for further improvements.”

About the Trail Area Health & Environment Program (THEP)

THEP supports the community of Trail and nearby areas to live, work and play in an area influenced by smelter air emissions. Since the 1890’s Trail has been home to one of the world’s largest lead and zinc smelting and refining facilities. For more than 30 years, a group of partners—the City of Trail, Teck Trail, B.C. Ministry of Environment and Parks, and Interior Health—in collaboration with the community, has worked together to continually improve the health and wellbeing of people living near the smelter. THEP focuses on air, soil, health, built environments (homes and other structures), community connection, and understanding the interrelationships between these focus areas. THEP addresses the inherent overlap of different ways people are exposed to lead and maximizes opportunities for improving health and the environment through an integrated approach. Each year, THEP supports hundreds of people in the community with outreach, activities and supplies.

The Trail Area Health & Environment Committee (THEC) is a select committee of Trail City Council and includes local government, the community, provincial and local partners. It was established in 2001 by the Trail Lead Task Force which had conducted research on the issues for 10 years prior. Its mandate is to be a transparent platform for multistakeholder dialogue, collective decision-making and community engagement specific to THEP. A full description is available [online](#).

Over the past three decades children’s blood lead levels in Trail have declined and air quality has improved. For more information please visit thep.ca.

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FAQ to follow.

BL Media Release FAQ Attachment

Why should I get my children's blood lead tested every year?

Blood lead levels vary year to year depending on where the child is spending their time (home, daycare, and outdoor play), their behaviour (crawling, hand to mouth activity) and their nutritional status (wide range of healthy foods, adequate iron stores). Blood lead testing ensures that children with elevated blood lead levels are identified and provided follow-up care. As a community, blood lead testing also helps monitor our overall progress in reducing lead exposure in the community. As lead can come from many sources, even if your home received soil management, you should continue to test your children's blood each year.

What should I do if I want to get my child's blood lead level tested?

Every year, THEP offers free voluntary testing of blood lead levels for children from the age of 6 to 36 months living in Trail, Casino, Oasis, Rivervale, Waneta and Warfield. Children up to 5 years old from other Lower Columbia communities are welcome to attend. Clinics are typically held in September with a follow-up clinic in February.

Please contact the Interior Health Public Health nurse for details. Call 250-364-6223 or text 250-231-5945.

Why is the blood lead clinic in September?

Lead levels are expected to be highest at the end of summer as windows and doors are open to the outdoors more, kids are playing outdoors more, and the ground in the community is snow-free and dry.

Are we going in the right direction?

Yes! We have seen a downward trend over the years. It's been under 3 micrograms per decilitre since 2018 with this year the average blood lead level being 2.2 micrograms per decilitre. To compare, in the 1990s, the average blood Pb level in Trail children was over 14 µg/dL.

Are we ever going to reach a safe blood lead level in Trail?

There is currently no known safe blood lead level. Canadian and U.S. health surveys indicate that the majority of the population has some exposure to lead. For the past five years, the average blood lead level for children 6-36 months in Trail has fallen well below 3 micrograms per decilitre and 90% of children tested are below the B.C. C.D.C.'s Exposure Investigation Level (of 5 µg/dL).