

Community partnership with Children's Wisconsin offers free lead testing for Milwaukee children, families

In partnership with the MacCanon Brown Homeless Sanctuary on Milwaukee's near-north side, Children's Wisconsin has been testing children for lead poisoning. The MacCanon Brown Homeless Sanctuary is a multi-resource center that helps meet community members' essential needs and provides connection to community and supportive resources. They typically serve those in the 53206 zip code — where Milwaukee's lead poisoning crisis is particularly serious.

Wisconsin is ranked among the top 10 states for highest percentages of children with elevated blood lead levels. Systemic inequities have led to disparities in lead exposure, with families with lower incomes and families of color disproportionately impacted.

Childhood lead poisoning results from hand-to-mouth behaviors involving environmental sources of lead, such as chipping or disturbed lead paint, lead dust, lead in the soil or lead water lines. Children impacted by lead poisoning can experience short- and long-term consequences, including decreased ability to learn, behavioral challenges, speech delays, hearing challenges, kidney damage and seizures. Consistent and early blood lead level testing remains the best way to identify children experiencing lead poisoning.

One young child who visited the community testing event had never been tested for lead before. When Children's performed their initial lead test, the level came back elevated, so the clinicians did a blood draw to confirm the finding at the City of Milwaukee Health Department lab. Unfortunately, the child's blood lead level was extremely high, necessitating inpatient admission. The family didn't have a primary care provider, so Children's connected them to a Children's pediatrician for ongoing care. Through more than a dozen events, Children's has tested more than 125 children. Significantly, approximately one-third of the children tested had elevated blood lead levels, demonstrating the importance of this opportunity to provide free testing and ensure kids are connected to the follow-up care and supports they may need.

-Children's Wisconsin-Milwaukee