



# LEAD POISONING PREVENTION IN RHODE ISLAND

*Legislative Fact Sheet May 2023*

## THE ISSUES

- Rhode Island has the third oldest housing stock in the U.S., with 72% of homes built before 1980 (1978 is when lead-based paint was banned nationally). RI law requires that homes be lead-safe. Less than ten percent of these homes hold a temporary lead certificate (HousingWorks RI, 2022). The age of Rhode Island's housing stock is a primary driver of health risks.
- Rhode Island has the second highest rate of serious lead poisoning (above 10 mcg/dl) in New England, nearly three times the rate of Massachusetts and four times the rate of Maryland. 1 in every 14 Rhode Island kindergarteners has been lead poisoned.
  - Depending on the municipality, between ~4% (East Greenwich) and ~18% (Providence) of elementary school students have been lead poisoned.
- Lead exposure – even at low levels – damages the brain and nervous system, increases a child's risk of developing permanent learning disabilities, reduces concentration and attentiveness, slows growth and development, and causes behavioral problems that may extend into adulthood.

## THE SOLUTIONS

- Child lead poisoning is entirely preventable.
- Decreasing lead poisoning rates by just a fraction can improve education outcomes and significantly reduce health and criminal justice costs.
  - \$1 spent = \$17-\$221 in benefits from reduced health and education costs and increased earning and tax revenue.
  - Nationally, a one microgram per deciliter reduction in the average blood lead levels of preschoolers may result in as many as 116,541 fewer burglaries, 2,499 fewer robberies, 53,905 fewer aggravated assaults, 4,186 fewer rapes, and 717 fewer murders (National Institutes of Health). For young boys exposed to lead, a one microgram per deciliter increase in blood lead levels increases the probability of future incarceration by between 27-74% (National Bureau of Economic Research).
- Lead enforcement and improving the condition of our existing housing stock is critical to address social determinants of health.

For more information about lead poisoning prevention:  
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