

Background

Lead is a toxic metal that can be found throughout a child’s environment. Lead exposure in children can cause learning, behavioral, and health problems. Lead in blood has been shown to affect children’s school performance, ability to pay attention, and IQ. The harmful effects of childhood lead exposure can be prevented. Testing children for lead exposure with a blood lead level (BLL) test is the best way to know if a child is exposed to lead.

Blood Lead Level Surveillance

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS), Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, maintains a surveillance system to track and monitor blood lead levels. All blood lead tests performed by health care providers are required to be reported to NDHHS within seven (7) days regardless of test result, sample type, or patient age.¹

The following tables summarizes statewide blood lead surveillance data among children less than six (6) years old from calendar years 2017 to 2021. During this period, the blood lead reference value of 5.0 micrograms per deciliter (µg/dL) was used to identify children with blood lead levels (BLL) that are higher than most children's levels. Note the blood lead reference value was updated to 3.5 µg/dL in 2022.

Children less than 6 years old tested with blood lead level, Nebraska, 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of Children Tested	36,243	36,345	39,175	33,757	33,503
Population	159,143	158,948	157,848	155,896	155,896
Percent of Children Tested	22.8%	22.9%	24.8%	21.7%	21.5%

Children less than 6 years old with blood lead level ≥ 5 µg/dL, Nebraska, 2017-2021

Case Status	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Confirmed Cases	517	1.4%	417	1.1%	407	1.0%	331	1.0%	299	0.9%
Suspect Cases	476	1.3%	425	1.2%	353	0.9%	256	0.8%	189	0.6%
Total Cases	993	2.7%	842	2.3%	760	1.9%	587	1.7%	488	1.5%

Note: Data are provisional and subject to change. Children are only counted once per year. For more information about confirmed and suspect case definitions, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/data/case-definitions-classifications.htm>

Data Sources: Blood lead level data from Nebraska Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS). Denominator population data are compiled from CDC Vintage 2020 bridged-race postcensal estimates released by NCHS. Population numbers for year 2020 are used for 2021 because they have not yet been released at the time of this report.

¹Nebraska Reportable Disease Regulations Title 173 Chapter 1

For More Information

For more information about lead exposures in Nebraska, visit www.dhhs.ne.gov/lead.