

Introduction to Rulemaking for WAC 246-101-010, Definitions within the Notifiable Conditions Regulations, Elevated Blood Lead Level

Introduction

In 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revised their guidance on childhood lead levels down from a 'level of concern' of 10 µg/dL to a 'reference value' of 5 µg/dL. In 2009, the CDC revised their guidance on adult lead down from 25 µg/dL to 10 µg/dL. The change in levels reflects mounting evidence that there is no safe level of lead.

Currently, WAC 246-101-010, Definitions within the Notifiable Conditions Regulations, defines an "elevated blood lead level" in children less than 15 years of age as ≥ 10 µg/dL and in adults 15 years and older as ≥ 25 µg/dL. Chapter 246-101 WAC, Notifiable Conditions, requires laboratories to report to the Department of Health all elevated blood lead test results within 2 days. Non-elevated results must be reported within thirty days.

A revised rule consistent with the CDC guidance would require medical laboratories that test for lead to report more results in the 2-day timeframe instead of the 30-day timeframe as more results would be considered elevated.

Background

The Washington State Department of Health has been conducting surveillance for lead poisoning since 1993. At that time, the CDC defined elevated blood lead levels in children as at or above the 'level of concern' of 10 µg/dL. This level of concern was the value used to create the definition of elevated blood lead level for children in Washington State's notifiable conditions rule. In 2012, the Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention (ACCLPP) recommended that the CDC change the 'level of concern' of 10 µg/dL to a 'reference value' of 5 µg/dL. The CDC endorsed the recommendations later that same year. The recommendation was based on research that demonstrated no safe level of lead for children. The reference value was set at the 97.5th percentile of blood lead levels from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) which is 5 µg/dL.

The CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) administers the Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology and Surveillance program (ABLES). At the time the notifiable conditions rule was written, ABLES defined elevated adult blood lead as 25 µg/dL or greater. In 2009, the Council for State and Territorial Epidemiologists published a position paper recommending the definition of elevated adult blood lead at 10 µg/dL, and the ABLES program endorsed the recommendation that same year.

Preliminary Draft Rule

The preliminary draft rule makes the definition of "elevated blood lead level" consistent with CDC guidance for adults and children. In addition, the preliminary draft clarifies the definition of "laboratory" by referencing the laboratory licensing requirements of chapter 246-338 WAC, Medical test site rules; and changes the term "boarding home" to "assistant living facility" consistent with chapter 10, Laws of 2012.