

**Institute Name:** Northeast Public Health Leadership Institute

**Project/Case Title:** Improving Childhood Lead Testing Rates in a Targeted Population

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**Background:** In July 2000, Scholars in the NEPHLI class of 2001 discussed low immunization and lead testing rates in Northeastern New York and possible strategies to address this issue. They decided to initiate a project to raise the immunization rates among newborns to 24 months, and to raise lead testing levels for children at 12 and 24 months. In July 2001, other Scholars in the Class of 2002 augmented the initial project in collaboration with the first group of Scholars. Their goal was to increase physician awareness of the requirements for performing lead tests in children. Scholars with both projects were employees of Health Plans and the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH).

**Methods:** The Class of 2001's primary focus was to **educate parents** by developing birthday cards with information about immunization and lead testing schedules. Birthday cards were distributed to parents of one and 2 year olds enrolled in an area health plan that included reminders that their children should be tested for lead and immunized during a scheduled well child visit. Immunization reminder post cards were sent to parents of children enrolled in the health plan when the children turned 4 months and 18 months old. All physicians were provided with materials regarding immunization and lead testing requirements. Monthly profile reports were sent to all physicians listing the names of the infants due for these services. The Class of 2002's focus after analyses of NYSDOH lead testing data was to concentrate on zip code areas with high lead poisoning rates. Their emphasis was to **educate physicians** serving children living in the high-risk areas. A letter signed by the medical directors of three major health plans reinforcing their responsibilities to test one and two year olds and the "New York State Physician Guide to Childhood Lead Poisoning" was mailed to 144 physicians.

**Results:** Preliminary data collected by the health plans one-year post study indicates a statistically significant increase in compliance for childhood lead testing rates. Health plans reported improvements of 12 to 18 percent for children tested for lead in the targeted areas. Health plan distribution of birthday and immunization reminder cards to parents and profile reports to providers has been implemented for 2 years.

**Conclusion:** These efforts resulted in very positive feedback from physicians. Many had assumed that they did not need to test if there were no obvious environmental factors apparent. The interventions increased awareness and compliance at the physician level and highlighted the need to test all one and two year old children. This successful project demonstrates how multiple health agencies can pool resources and data to collaboratively produce a working model for disease intervention.