



How can residents and health professionals work together to stop an epidemic of lead poisoning in their own community?

Lessons from Monterey County

What do we know about the lead problem in Monterey*?

- **Monterey County lead cases stand out among all counties in California.** When looking only at counties that have large burden of lead poisoning, Monterey County ranks highest in the proportion of lead poisoning cases found among children and teens that were tested. This is largely due to there being so many cases in the city of Seaside.
- **Seaside alone has more lead poisoning cases than do most entire counties in California.** The number of lead poisoning cases found **EACH YEAR** in children and teens screened for lead in **just Seaside** is larger than total number of cases in 45 of the 58 counties in California. The counties with more cases than Seaside are large counties like Los Angeles, San Diego, Alameda, and Orange County
- **Seaside and Salinas have the largest number of cases in all of Monterey County.** For example, while lead screening tests done in Seaside account for <10% of the lead tests in children and teens for all of Monterey County, Seaside has close to 40% of lead poisoning cases – this on-going trend has been documented since 2004.

Where is the lead coming from in Monterey County?

- A public health team investigated the problem and **found that eating lead-contaminated foods that were imported from Mexico was the primary source of lead among children and pregnant women who participated in a Monterey-County-based study**¹²
- Lead-contaminated foods come to California through home-made “care packages”, sent by transnational families *who do not realize the foods are sometimes contaminated with lead.* **There is nothing illegal about this, but it is an unfortunate problem. That is why we want to work with community leaders to develop a community prevention plan.**

What can be done to work collaboratively on this and other health issues of central importance to the health and well-being of community members?

Work with youth groups to get the word out:

One effort has been to partner public health and literacy professionals with community groups that work with youth about nutrition, such as the regional Cooperative Extension office, and Salinas and Seaside youth. Through this partnership, youth have developed a **fotonovela “Get out the lead!”**, in English and Spanish, that addresses the sources of lead that may harm residents and the community concerns about discrimination on the basis of food choices. There are many ways to build on this work and to involve youth and youth advocates in disseminating this fotonovela or adapting it for different audiences and health topics.

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See it and others at:

http://cemonterey.ucdavis.edu/EFNEP122/b_i_Fotonovelas_b_i.htm

Work with educators in the community:

Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) and literacy practitioners in Monterey County are creating classroom activities that **address lead poisoning prevention from many sources including imported foods, while also recognizing the importance of food identity, healthy eating and the importance of maintaining strong transnational ties with families living outside the US.** These classroom settings are an important way to engage communities about public health topics and support community health literacy in the context of recent migration to the US. There are also many ways to help these classes fulfill these curriculum goals. Contact: Maricel Santos mgsantos@sfsu.edu

Attend skill-building workshops for developing outreach and educational tools:

Planned for Fall 2009 for creating health education materials to meet community health needs and to involve community voices and images. Formats include ESL lessons, digital story-telling and *fotonovelas*. Contact: Ashley Richards aer213@yahoo.com

Form civic partnerships for outreach to transnational residents who may lack access to health education and health literacy initiatives in their language:

Create civic and business-oriented working groups to develop strategies for increasing community involvement in addressing health issues affecting Monterey residents such as diabetes, lead, violence, and family health. Working groups can focus on organizing health-related community activities like health fairs, booths at street fairs, or on bringing health information into education settings, workplaces, meeting places (such as playgrounds, sporting events, libraries, local businesses), or on engaging with civic leadership at the mayor, city council and regions supervisors level to increase awareness about the importance of focusing health prevention more activities on youth and transnational communities living in Monterey County. Contact: Margaret Handley handleym@medsfgh.ucsf.edu

More information about the lead problem in Monterey County and efforts to address it:

New America Media:

“There’s lead in my grasshopper snack” by Elena Shore

http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=93856b1c427e995ccdb2aca6cdd5b303

Salinas Californian:

“Alisal students become lead detectives” by Kimber Solana

<http://www.thecalifornian.com/article/20090603/NEWS01/906030315/1002/Alisal+students+become+lead+detectives>

SF Chronicle:

“Oaxacan townspeople have high lead levels” by Monica Campbell

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/06/23/MN2510ME0F.DTL>

Academic journals

1. Handley MA, Grieshop J. Globalized Migration and Transnational Epidemiology. *International Journal of Epidemiology*. 2007. December; 36: 1205-1206.
2. Handley MA, Hall, AC, Sanford ED, Diaz E, Gonzalez-Mendez E, Drace K , Wilson R, Villalobos M, Croughan M. Globalization, Bi-national Communities and Imported Food Risks: Results of An Outbreak Investigation of Lead Poisoning in Monterey, California. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2007. May; 97(5):900-6.

* Data on Monterey County lead cases derived from California Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch reports. Available upon request from Margaret Handley