

Lead poisoning cases on the rise in Baltimore



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BALTIMORE —

Baltimore City saw 99 new cases of lead poisoning in 2018 -- an increase of 18 from the previous year.

The City Council's Health Committee wants the problem addressed. Committee Chairman Kirsterfer Burnett said Wednesday hearing was a starting point. Members want to gather information and work to develop policy and legislation on this issue.

"Even one child who is exposed to lead is going to have devastating, lifelong effects from that exposure," a member of the Health Department said.

Those effects cannot be reversed.

"Fortunately, kids do have some ability, as their brains are developing and growing, they can compensate for that to some extent, but parts of their brain have suffered damage and that may lead to problems with learning disabilities with behavioral problems with ADD/ADHD," Ichniowski said.

"This is a root cause for issues in our schools, in our streets and our families across the city," said Dr. Lawrence Brown, of Morgan State University.

Advocates want lawmakers to focus on prevention and making sure children are tested. The Health Department says it's working to raise awareness about testing.

"We're partnering with managed care organizations to identify children that have not been tested at 12 and 24 months, as required by law, to alert their parents of the need for this and the dangers of lead poisoning," a member from the Health Department said.

"At birth, let's go into the home. Don't wait until the blood lead level shows anything. Get rid of lead in the homes when our children are born first," Brown said.

Committee Chair Kristerfer Burnett said this issue must be a priority to make sure Baltimore becomes a lead-free city.

"A figure that was thrown out tonight, it would cost \$845 million to really address the existing lead in our existing housing stock. Obviously, that's a huge number when we talk about the fact that our budget is \$3 billion. That's close to a billion (dollars) on that one issue. So I do think we need to figure out a long-term funding strategy," Burnett said.

Burnett said he's also concerned that the city's public housing is not lead-free. He said that is particularly problematic.