

New York State Senate
In-Person Public Hearing on
Childhood Lead Poisoning and Prevention in New York State

Testimony of Robert W. Amler, MD, MMS, MBA, FAAP, FACPM
Tuesday, November 30, 2021, 10:00 am

I am Dr. Robert Amler, a vice president, dean, and professor at New York Medical College. I am cofounder of NYSCHECK, the statewide network of Children’s Environmental Health Centers specializing in environmental exposures to mercury, solvents, pesticides, and of course, lead.

I am also the former chief medical officer of CDC’s Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and regional health administrator, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

More than 30,000 children in New York have lead levels higher than CDC’s new standard. That puts them at greater risk than the majority and these children are mostly from lower-income households in substandard housing.

We can’t handle this with current resources. A substantial new investment is urgently needed in three key sectors to protect these children.

- 1. Our county health departments** are already overtaxed and understaffed. They urgently need significantly more sanitarians and nurses and greatly expanded funding to ramp up home investigations for every child at risk. Locating the lead sources is labor-intensive and time consuming, and an impossible task without a substantial increase in trained personnel and funding.

- 2. Private property owners** urgently need a comprehensive support program to cover the expense for mandated cleanup, which requires skilled personnel and is often beyond average homeowners’ ability to pay. Millions of New York families live in pre-1980 housing containing lead paint that remains a health threat until they can afford to get the lead out. But absent State support, most cleanups simply will not happen.

- 3. The Network of Children’s Environmental Health Centers** will require an appropriate-size grant supplement to manage the projected surge in children and families requiring medical evaluations and practical solutions to mitigate the risk of lead exposure. The Centers also will fill a vital evaluation function as the programs run and will document New York’s progress, successes, and best practices for other States to emulate.

Thank you for the privilege of speaking this morning. NYSCHECK stands ready to help find innovative solutions to mitigate lead exposure. I will remain available to provide additional information if needed.

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