



Lead Advisory Committee and Healthy Homes Outreach Task Force

Quarterly Meeting Summary

February 11, 2025

Summary

On February 11, 2025, thirty-six lead and healthy homes professionals met in person and via Zoom for the quarterly NC Lead and Healthy Homes Outreach Task Force meeting. Members submitted their program updates on lead and healthy homes activities during the meeting, and details are included below. This meeting was supported by funding from the NC DHHS Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (NC CLPPP) and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). **A list of meeting participants and their contact information are listed at the end of these notes.**

Local, State, and Federal Updates

Kate Kohler (State Lab of Public Health)

- The State Lab underwent a CLIA inspection, which required defining “ambient temperature” for specimen handling. This led to a stability study on capillary specimens, revealing that they remain stable at varying temperatures for up to 14 days.
- Due to this finding, the acceptance criteria for capillary and venous specimens changed to a 14-day acceptability period starting January 22, 2025.
- A memo was sent to providers about the change, and a one-page blood lead submission guide was provided.
- Key guidelines
 - One specimen per bag.
 - No more than 30 specimens per box for shipping.
 - Correct form (DHHS 3707) must be used with accurate information, including Medicaid status.
 - Specimens must be packed with absorbent material and the requisition form in the sleeve of the bag.
 - Courier services are available for health departments, while private clinics can use prepaid boxes.
 - Ambient temperature is defined between 15°C and 38°C.

R.B. Gardener (City of Wilmington Healthy Homes Program)

Federal funding freeze was temporarily enacted but later rescinded by HUD. However, uncertainties about future funding remain. Current federal grant ends in November 2026. In the meantime, the program continues to move forward with contingencies in place, awaiting further guidance from HUD.

Kendalyn Kufner (City of Wilmington Healthy Homes Program):

The Wilmington Healthy Homes program has made significant progress with 32 home intervention projects completed since late 2023. This is a notable accomplishment for the team.

Angela Maskill (Reinvestment Partners):

- The Breathe Easy program works with families throughout the state to provide asthma and COPD home remediations.
- Service areas now expanded with new funding, especially for regions including Cape Fear and potentially the Triangle area.
- A significant increase in the number of cases served, with 49 cases in January being the largest volume seen.
- Focus is on delivering air purifiers, allergen filters, non-toxic cleaning supplies, pest control, and bed encasements.
- An interesting new development is the demand for refills and replacements for damaged items from displaced families (e.g., air purifiers flooded or damaged) following Hurricane Helene in western NC.

Update on EPA Regulation:

- New EPA dust levels for lead clearance and hazard levels are under review. North Carolina is a delegated state, so the new rules will automatically be adopted unless legislative changes occur.
- Current discussion is about when to adjust state regulations in line with these changes—either in 2026 or 2027.
- A possible challenge is ensuring funding continuity after October 2025 due to pending federal funding uncertainties.

Update on ARPA and Medicaid Funding (Ed Norman, NC DHHS Children's Environmental Health):

ARPA funds have been allocated; however some funding uncertainty exists due to changes in the federal landscape, including Medicaid funds that support regional staff, as well as the health data team operations and UNC's outreach that are dependent on CDC funding, and potential cuts could significantly impact the program.

Research Triangle Institute's Programming Update on Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids (Jennifer Redmon):

- Schools and child care centers are progressing well with the water component of the program.
- Work on lead-based paint and asbestos inspections is increasing as more sites begin their inspections, with an anticipated surge in inspections over the next few months, especially before summer when schools are closed.
- Focus continues on timely mitigation activities during school breaks.
- 1500 facilities in process, 400 completed.
- Asbestos: 1400 enrolled, 340 completed.

Additional notes from Ed Norman Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids:

- The program has made significant progress with water testing and mitigations, and more than half of the schools have been completed.
- The program is gearing up for a surge in lead-based paint and asbestos site visits as the deadline approaches.
- A reminder was given that child care homes only need to test water once, not every three years, as per the latest regulations.
- 1800 schools enrolled, with 3100 total schools (about halfway through).

Nellie Benitez (Chatham County Health Department - Children's Lead Prevention Program)

- Recent investigations revealed lead exposure from:
 - Clay pots used for cooking that tested high for lead.
 - Hibiscus flower, used to make tea or water, found to be a lead source.
 - The hibiscus flower was commonly found in dried form, sold by the pound in zip-lock bags for making tea or water. This discovery was new for Nellie's team.

Luke Van Eyk (Guilford County Health Department - Children's Environmental Health) reported the latest details on lead investigations:

- 18 investigations offered, 1 completed.
- 1 remediation clearance inspection.
- 13 notices sent for blood lead levels (BLL) of 5-7.
- 8 cases of BLL, 1 greater than 0.10.

Christine Westfall (Central Pines Regional Council of Governments)

Christine shared that her program, funded through a HUD lead capacity building grant, aims to provide lead paint remediation in low-income homes within the Triangle region. She is seeking to connect with those serving families and children who might have lead paint issues.

Discussions

Lead in Hibiscus Flowers:

- There has been ongoing discussion about the presence of lead in spices and other products like hibiscus flowers, particularly those used for teas or water. Nellie shared that the hibiscus flowers were tested for lead, and some samples showed high lead levels.
- **Resources Available:**
 - The Healthy Homes website now features a **Lead Spices Library** that includes product recalls and testing results for spices and other plants potentially containing lead.
 - The website is frequently updated with recalls from FDA, other national sources and insights from states with significant childhood lead poisoning prevention programs (e.g., New York, Minnesota).

- **Next Steps:**
 - **Neasha Graves (UNC Institute for the Environment)** said that the UNC team will review and update the website’s library to include information on hibiscus flowers and similar products that might be used in teas or food preparations.
 - **Doris Hogan (Forsyth County Health Department)** shared that she has seen hibiscus flowers frequently in her region and is investigating whether they come from certain regions, such as Guerrero. She is also using resources like the recall book and Lead Safe Mama’s recommendations to help educate families.

Relative Links & Upcoming Events

- [Memo to Submitters Hema chemistry](#)
- [BloodShippingLeadGuidelines](#)
- [Lead Sources Library](#)

NEXT MEETING DETAILS:

The next meeting will be in the Eagle Room at the NC DPH Headquarters on 5605 Six Forks Road in Raleigh on May 13, 2025 at 10am – 1pm, with the option to join virtually, too. UNC will send driving directions and details about ordering lunch for this meeting. Tentative presenters will include Legal Aid of NC, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and Jennifer Hoponick Redmon.

Attendees

Joseph Aguilar	Healthy Homes Coordinator	Orange County	jaguilar@orangecountync.gov
Brenda Bass	Regional Environmental Health Specialist	Children’s Environmental Health, NC DHHS	brenda.bass@dhhs.nc.gov
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Jennifer Hoponick Redmon	Senior Director, Environmental Health and Water Quality	RTI International	jredmon@rti.org

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