



October 31, 2025  
NJ DEP Environmental Justice Advisory Council  
EJAC Public Meeting Comment  
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## What environmental justice issues should be prioritized in the next administration?

Eliminate Sources of Lead Exposure: [Soil](#) | [Water](#)

### Dear Environmental Justice Advisory Council,

Lead-Free NJ (LFNJ) is a collaborative with nearly 300 members that centers [Community Hubs](#)—local grassroots organizations that advance local efforts and support statewide advocacy. The collaborative is working to eliminate lead exposure in New Jersey. LFNJ developed this document describing the state of lead exposure prevention in New Jersey and avenues to expand the work in the next Governor's administration. This document is for educational purposes and does not endorse any specific candidate or policy.

### Thousands of NJ Children are Exposed to Lead

Human exposure to lead is unsafe at any amount and has been linked to neurological damage and slowed development in children,<sup>1</sup> increased blood pressure and fertility problems in adults,<sup>2</sup> and preeclampsia during pregnancy.<sup>3</sup> From July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022, the most recent period for which data is available, 2,848 NJ children had a blood lead level greater than 5 µg/dL, a value connected to poor educational outcomes.<sup>4</sup> The number of children exposed to alarming levels of lead is likely much higher since only 23% of children under age six received a test at all.<sup>5</sup>

### NJ Can't Afford Lead Exposure

There are high costs to the public of deferring the elimination of lead. An analysis of lead exposure impacts on children born in 2019 in NJ showed that the cost to the state and municipalities would be \$383.8 million for just that birth cohort over their lifetimes. The total fiscal burden to private, state, local, and federal budgets is estimated at nearly \$3 billion due to reduced lifetime earnings, health care costs, institutional involvement, education impacts, social assistance spending, and premature mortality.<sup>6</sup>

### Lead Exposure is a Racial and Economic Injustice

Lead poisoning in NJ disproportionately impacts children living in predominantly Black, Brown, and low-income communities.

The NJ county with the highest percentage of children younger than six with an elevated blood lead level is Cumberland, which is also the county with the highest percentage of persons in poverty.

The large municipalities in NJ with the highest percentage of children younger than six with an elevated blood lead level are Trenton, Irvington, East Orange, Plainfield, and Paterson. These towns all contain majority Black and Brown populations, and the percentage of persons in poverty in these towns ranges from 17.1 to 24.7 percent, well above the state percentage of 9.7 percent.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/lead-prevention/symptoms-complications/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/lead/signs-symptoms/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9816335/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://nchh.org/resource-library/Childhood\\_Lead\\_Exposure.pdf](https://nchh.org/resource-library/Childhood_Lead_Exposure.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nj.gov/health/childhood-lead/documents/childhood-lead-2022-annual-report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://valueofleadprevention.org/calculations.php?state=New%20Jersey>

<sup>7</sup> HDPulse: An Ecosystem of Minority Health and Health Disparities Resources. National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. Created 1/24/2025. Available from <https://hdpulse.nimhd.nih.gov>

To advance racial and economic justice, New Jersey's next Governor must take action to eliminate lead exposure in the communities most impacted by the issue.

### **New Jersey Leads the Nation in Lead Poisoning Prevention – Let's Keep Going**

In 2021, New Jersey passed state laws that are the strongest in the nation to prevent lead exposure, including P.L. 2021, c. 182, requiring periodic inspection of certain rental housing for lead paint hazards, and P.L. 2021, Ch. 183, requiring the removal of drinking water lead service lines by 2031. These laws represent a paradigm shift in the battle against lead, prioritizing prevention instead of relying only on mitigation once exposure has occurred.

NJ is making measurable progress in reducing elevated blood lead levels. Between 2017 and 2022, the percentage of children under six with an elevated level of lead in their blood dropped from 2.5% to 1.9%. Now is the time to keep up the momentum and ensure this legacy of lead exposure prevention becomes long-lasting. **The next Governor should consider the following to protect the health of New Jerseyans:**

#### Eliminate Sources of Lead Exposure

Lead poisoning is 100% preventable when sources of lead exposure are removed or remediated. The NJ DEP can help eliminate exposure to lead from soil and drinking water.

#### **Lead in Soil**

##### **Recognize lead in soil as a public health threat in New Jersey**

- Due to historic contamination, lead in soil is found at unhealthy levels in many NJ communities. In July 2025, the United States Environmental Protection Agency listed approximately 30 areas in the East Trenton neighborhood of Trenton as a Superfund site because of lead-contaminated soil left by historic pottery manufacturing.<sup>8</sup> This is just one example of an affected area.
- The Governor can support efforts between the NJDEP and the EPA to investigate and remediate lead in soil, focused on overburdened environmental justice communities. In heavily impacted areas with no one source of lead in soil that can be identified, where, accordingly, there is no way for EPA to hold any entity responsible for cleanup, the **Governor can dedicate funds for cleanup.**



#### **Lead in Drinking Water**

##### **Dedicate state funding to lead service line replacement**

- The state law requiring the replacement of lead service lines (LSLs) – a portion of pipe that connects the water main to the building inlet, and the primary source of lead exposure from drinking water – was passed without any dedicated funding for LSL replacement. In 2022, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) acknowledged that the cost for lead service line replacement is between \$2.1 billion and \$3.2 billion statewide<sup>9</sup>
- The Governor can encourage NJDEP to continue **prioritizing lead service line principal loan forgiveness** for disadvantaged communities through the Drinking Water Intended Use Plan (IUP) once the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding expires.
- The Governor can encourage NJDEP to continue to **consider set-asides for galvanized lines** not downstream from lead that are not funded by federal dollars.



<sup>8</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-adds-historic-potteries-site-trenton-superfund-national-priorities-list>

<sup>9</sup> Appendix 1 of the Final Drinking Water Intended Use Plan for Federal Fiscal Year 2022 (and State Fiscal Year 2023) - see page 27.

- The Governor can support efforts to **allocate funding**, such as legislation authorizing state bonds for no-cost lead service line replacements to consumers.

### **Support legislation and programs that require lead service line replacement at no cost to customers statewide**

- This is the most efficient and equitable way to replace lead service lines<sup>10</sup>.

### **Disclosure of lead in drinking water hazards to tenants**

- Although water utilities are required to notify property owners of lead service lines, renters may not receive this information. **The Governor can support the implementation of state law requiring disclosure of lead in drinking water hazards to tenants.**

### **Improve data/information accessibility of lead in drinking water in schools**

- In 2019, Governor Murphy promised to create a public, central database to report school lead in drinking water results. The next Governor can deliver on this promise, ensuring that NJDEP and NJDOE execute this initiative.

### **Oversight for Securing Our Children's Future Bond Act**

- The NJ Department of Education (NJDOE) oversees the \$100 million in state bonds authorized for water infrastructure improvements in NJ schools through the Securing Our Children's Future program. Only \$6.6 million of the \$100 million dedicated to school lead in drinking water remediation has been spent. The NJDOE opened a second round of grant applications in June 2025. The NJDOE can take proactive steps to help schools access this funding and process applications in a timely manner.

### **Water filter support for schools and childcare facilities**

- In New Jersey, current policy requires school districts to periodically test for lead in drinking water and take action when lead is found. However, testing methods do not capture the full risk of lead in drinking water exposure and water fountain shut-offs due to lead contamination obstruct students' access to water. Providing filters to proactively remove lead from drinking water is a more effective way to address this issue<sup>11</sup>. P.L.2025, c.76 established a new grant program in NJDOE for public schools to purchase and install water filters. **The Governor can support the implementation of this law and further actions that increase the availability of water filters for schools and childcare facilities.**

Sincerely,

[Lead-Free NJ members](#) & [Lead-Free NJ leadership](#)

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