

Child Lead Poisoning: Advocating for Automatic Eligibility for Illinois Early Intervention Services

Lead poisoning is one of the most prevalent, yet preventable, environmental health hazards that can affect any family, regardless of race or socioeconomic status. There is **no** safe level of lead in the body. The consequences of lead poisoning in children can often include: damage to the brain and central nervous system, lower I.Q. scores, developmental delay, and poor impulse control.

What is the Illinois Early Intervention Program, and what services are provided to participating children and their families?

- The Early Intervention program (EI) was created to enhance the development of infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) with disabilities, minimize potential developmental delay, and decrease the need for special education services for school-aged children.
- Eligible children and their families are entitled to receive a broad range of services designed to maximize their development including:
 - Speech and language therapy
 - Developmental therapy
 - Occupational therapy
 - Physical therapy
 - Social work services

Scientific findings support automatic eligibility for Illinois (EI) services:

- A study examining blood lead levels (BLLs) found that children with elevated BLLs were associated with increased diagnosis of attention deficit and hyperactive disorder (ADHD).
- A study examining readiness for kindergarten entry found that on average, reading readiness scores decreased significantly with children having elevated BLLs.
- A study examining BLLs in relation to the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) found that Chicago Public School children who had elevated BLLs scored significantly lower in the math and reading sections of the exam in relation to state standards.

Why is automatic eligibility of (EI) imperative for Illinois children found to have lead poisoning?

- Children with disabilities, including those exposed to lead, have been shown to make profound progress with intensive and appropriate early childhood services. Those gains are in the very areas often found most challenging for children who have experienced lead poisoning:
 - Executive functioning
 - Behavioral impulse control
 - Literacy
- Automatic eligibility would allow lead poisoned children to have immediate access to resources including locally-based developmental therapists and other professionals working with the children and their families to develop skills that can help them thrive; such investments can reduce the need for special education, lead to long-term cost savings and positive childhood outcomes.
- Federal regulations allow states to include lead poisoning as a medical condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay, automatically qualifying a child for EI services.
- EI programs have a strong track record of success. 54-62% of children receiving EI services exit the program functioning within age expectations.

Amending EI rules to allow automatic eligibility for children suffering from lead poisoning in IL would bring the state into alignment with at least 19 other states that are striving to overcome developmental delays that can occur as a result of lead exposure.