

The Case for Prenatal Blood Lead Level Screening
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Problem: Lead exposure continues to be a national problem. Although one of the most common sources of this lead exposure remains old paint containing lead, more research on other lead sources is coming to light. Of concern, pregnant women exposed to lead can pass this to their unborn baby.

Evidence: Screenings of pregnant women in New York and Minnesota have revealed elevated blood lead levels among this population.

Strategy: *Project LIFE* (Lead Investigation and Family Education) - aims to 1) increase knowledge regarding lead exposure in the community and its effect on children; and 2) increase knowledge regarding the incidence of elevated blood lead levels in pregnant women.

Practice Change: Pregnant women between 24 and 36 weeks gestation were screened at prenatal clinics in the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District and University Health System. After consent, these women answered a 20 question survey regarding possible sources of lead exposure including pica. A venous specimen for a blood lead level was obtained following this survey. Women with elevated blood lead levels of ≥ 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ were asked to participate in the second phase of the study.

Evaluation: Women interviewed on a one-on-one basis regarding possible risk factors for lead exposure were very receptive to the information provided and to discussion of the risk factors. The majority of the women did not have any information related to the risk factors for lead exposure nor had they discussed these risks with their health care providers.

Recommendations: Universal screening of all pregnant women should be incorporated into prenatal care. A culturally-sensitive survey which includes questions specific to a local population can be utilized in the clinical setting. Educational efforts geared towards both these pregnant women and their health care providers can help ameliorate lead exposure in both the women and their unborn babies.

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