

Appendix B – WasteMINZ Open Letter to Ministers 2024

18 October 2024

Hon Dr Shane Reti, Minister of Health
Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education
Hon Penny Simmonds, Minister for the Environment
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 2060

By email

Open Letter to the Minister of Health, Minister of Education and Minister for the Environment

Lead is a threat to NZ children everywhere. We are not doing enough.

This week is the World Health Organisation's [International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week](#): “Bright futures begin lead free”.

We call on the government to prevent lead poisoning in our tamariki. Our efforts to encourage action have fallen flat despite current government promises to prevent harm. New Zealand lacks national commitment to monitor and reduce lead exposure in young children, who are the most at risk. We are tired of inaction. We need to do better now.

What is the problem?

There is no safe level of lead in people of any age, but children are exceptionally sensitive to its adverse effects. Lead affects the developing brain. Lead exposure early in life can lead to irreversible attention, behavioural, cognitive and intellectual impairments¹.

Children from NZ's poorest communities are likely to suffer most from exposure to lead from paints in older housing, old painted furniture and cheap toys. Lead from paint contaminates soil around homes, childcare centres and schools indefinitely.

The Government Policy Statement on Health 2024-2027 states one of the three priority areas for action is Prevention², and that it will “prioritise investment in children”³.

¹ CDC, 2024. “Centre for Disease Control Updates Blood Lead Reference Value”. An official website of the United States Government. <https://www.cdc.gov/lead-prevention/php/news-features/updates-blood-lead-reference-value.html>. Accessed 30/09/2024.

² “Prevention is a focus that needs to sit across all health service delivery. It includes population and public health policies and interventions that prevents illness from occurring.”

³ To strengthen prevention in the health system, the Government will: “Prioritise investment in children to support a good start to life and to prevent, or lessen, life-long impacts from poor childhood health, which can also reduce future avoidable health costs.”


What we need:

1. **Strategic and unified action** to detect and reduce children's lead exposure, such as the UK's Lead Exposure Public Health Interventions and Surveillance working group (est. 2021).
2. **Monitoring** blood lead levels in children. Screening children for lead exposure allows early intervention, lessening lifelong impacts and avoidable health costs, and reduces behavioural or cognitive interventions in schools, workplaces, and the justice system. Low-cost, non-invasive, finger prick methods are available.
3. **Education and prevention improvements**; including take-home information, online information for DIYers, free kits to check for the presence of lead-based paint, and up-to-date advice on how to handle lead paint safely. Public education campaigns on traditional and social media platforms.

The time to tackle this is now, before more of our children face life-long harm by preventable exposure to lead. Help us make this International Lead Poisoning Prevention week one to remember.

On behalf of the WasteMINZ Residential Lead Working Group,

Michelle Begbie

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle Begbie".

Chair of the Residential Lead Working Group

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About the WasteMINZ Residential Lead Working Group

WasteMINZ is the largest representative body of Aotearoa New Zealand's waste, resource recovery and contaminated land sectors. We have over 300 member organisations, with 1500 individual members. Our sector groups are regularly called upon by the Ministry for the Environment to consult on key projects and pieces of legislation, and we have a long-running relationship with central government.

The WasteMINZ Residential Lead Working Group formed in 2018 and includes representatives from the health sector, lead awareness advocates, and the water, paint retail and trade industries. The group is concerned with the undetermined magnitude of health effects from multiple residential (non-occupational) sources of lead. Our purpose is to bring together people to identify and address gaps in knowledge and practice for the benefit of all New Zealanders.

You can read more about what the working group does and our position statement on the [WasteMINZ website](#).