

Lead paint remains main cause of lead poisoning in Rock County

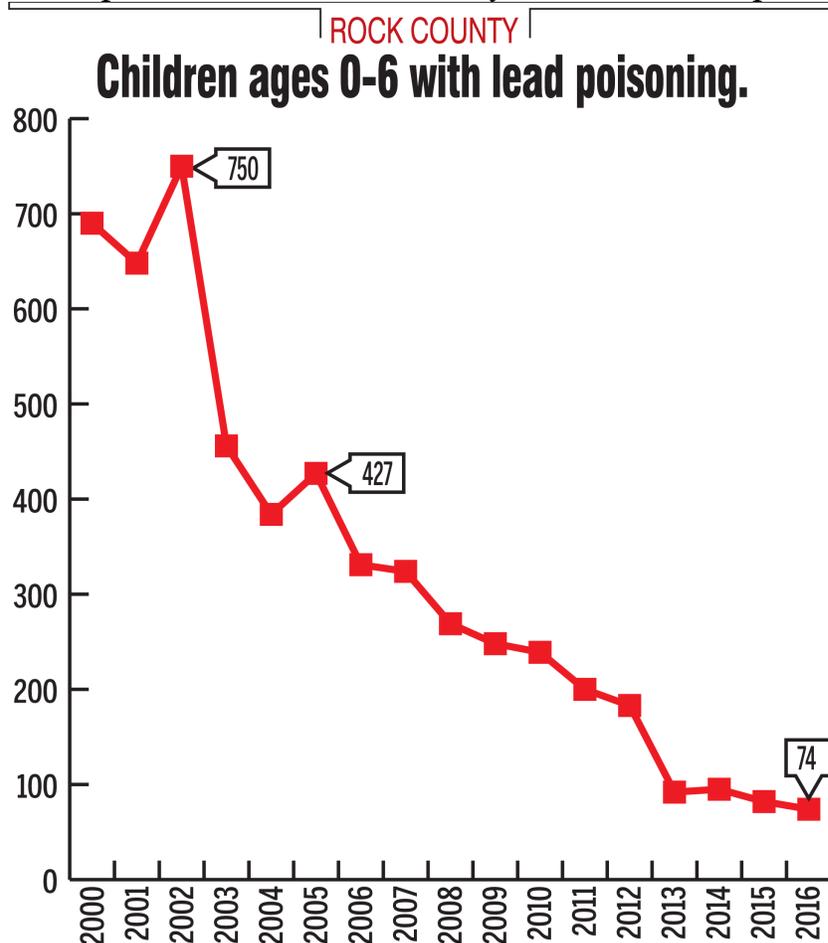
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Warnings about kids eating lead paint chips might seem like a thing of the past, but health officials say lead poisoning remains a problem, particularly in Rock County.

Wisconsin Environment and the Wisconsin Public Interest Group released a report April 8 that gave the state a failing grade for its policies that protect children from lead exposure.

The advocacy groups are pressuring state officials to pay for the removal of lead plumbing in school and day care facilities and to create policies to detect and remove lead from school drinking water.

In Rock County, however, kids are exposed to lead primarily because they live in older homes with lead paint, not because they drink tainted water, said Matt Wesson, environmental health supervisor for the Rock County Public Health Department.



SOURCE: Rock County Public Health Department

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Seventy-four Rock County children from birth to age 6 were reported to have lead poisoning in 2016, according to the state Environmental Public Health Tracking Program.

Lead poisoning means a child's blood level has 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter, according to the state Department of Health Services.

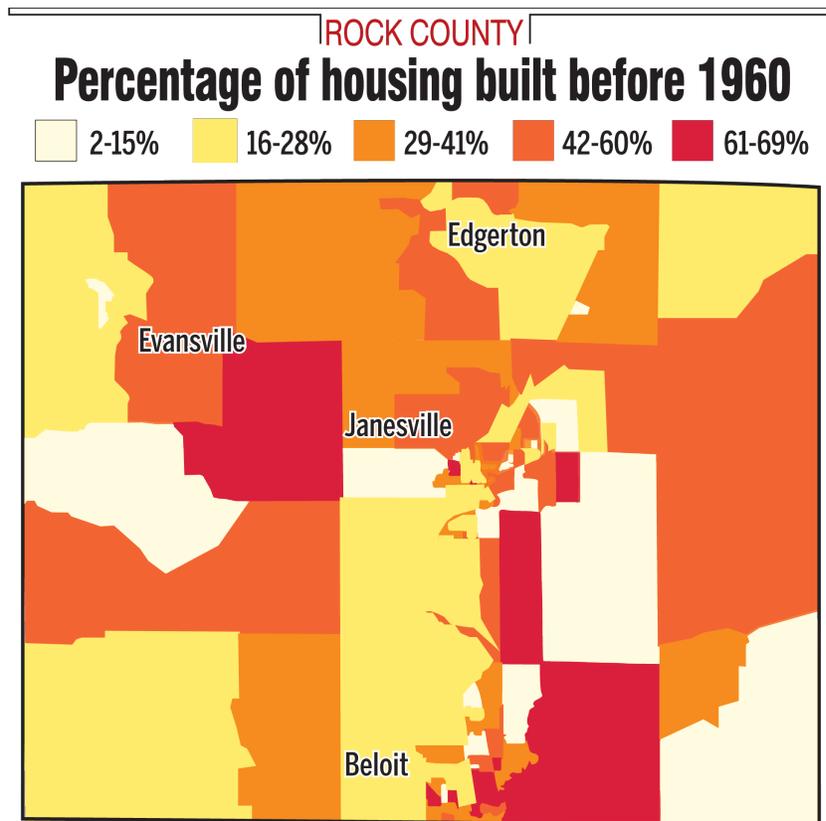
The number of reported lead poisonings is down significantly from 2002, when 750 children were reported to have lead poisoning in the county. That year had the most reported cases since 2000, according to the data.

Rock County had the third-highest number of reported lead poisonings in the state's 72 counties in 2016, behind Milwaukee and Racine counties, according to the data.

The number of lead poisonings has decreased over time but has started to plateau in recent years, prompting the health department to seek new ways to prevent lead exposure, Wesson said.

Most cases of lead poisoning in Rock County stem from exposure to lead paint in old houses, he said.

Rock County, especially Janesville, is home to a large number of houses built before 1978, when the federal government banned the use of lead paint.



SOURCE: Rock County Public Health Department

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Many of the older homes in Janesville are rentals, which sometimes are not well-kept and pose risks for lead exposure, Wesson said.

Lead exposure often occurs when part of a house—such as a window—sees a lot of friction, and paint comes off in fine chips or dust, thus exposing old layers of paint and moving the old paint dust around the house.

Young kids then come in contact with the dust and accidentally consume it, Wesson

said.

He recommends that parents ask their pediatricians to test children for lead exposure at regular checkups or if they think their children are at high risk for exposure.

Lead poisoning can happen to anyone, but it can be particularly damaging to children younger than 6. Lead poisoning can affect mental and physical development which, if stunted at an early age, can have life-long consequences, Wesson said.

Lead poisoning does not have any immediate, visible symptoms, however, which is why Wesson recommends regular testing by pediatricians.

When doctors report a confirmed case of lead poisoning to the state, the state contacts the health department to do a follow-up with the family to identify lead sources in the home and recommend solutions, Wesson said.

The health department allows supervisors to visit homes to look for lead and provide additional resources.

More information

Those with concerns about lead exposure in Rock County can call the health department at 608-757-5440 to request that a supervisor assess a home or provide additional resources.