



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Luis R. Sepúlveda

# **With Start of School, Senator Luis Sepúlveda, Medical Experts and Community Leaders Call for New Lead Poisoning Screening Standards**

Luis Sepúlveda

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ISSUE:

- [lead testing](#)
- [Lead](#)
- [Community Health](#)
- [Nurses](#)
- [Medical](#)

# PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN FROM LEAD POISONING

Lead interferes with the body's production of hemoglobin, causing



Lead delays mental development, lowers IQ

State Senator Luis Sepúlveda announced today major legislation to increase protections for children against lead poisoning and the host of medical problems it carries with it.

Sepúlveda's legislation would extend required screening from the present age of six to up to ten year olds, and would raise the minimum danger level for lead found in a child's blood, among other measures.

"Almost 60 years ago, New York City lead the nation in protecting its residents against lead poisoning by becoming the first municipality to mandate lead poison screening in our children," said the Senator, joined by medical experts and community leaders outside Bronx Public School 140 in Morrisania.

"Back then, our science and medical community told us that a lead level of 60 micrograms per deciliter of blood was safe. Today we know that a level that high in a child causes nerve damage, lower IQ, hearing loss, stunted growth, hypertension and infertility."

Senator Sepúlveda noted that while the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) labels lead levels in the blood over 5 micrograms per deciliter of blood poisoning that should trigger intervention and prevention strategies, New York State's standard is 10 micrograms per deciliter.

“This higher threshold used by our State is now outdated and puts our children at risk,” said Sepúlveda.

He also noted that “experts now tell us that as many as 40% of children have not been properly diagnosed because children under the age of three are required to undergo two screenings, and then only verbal check-ups at annual doctor visits till age six. That is why my bill extends the age to ten, and with actual blood testing.”

The verbal screenings “consist of a pediatrician asking a parent about lead exposure in the home,” said the Senator. “HOW are parents supposed to know about the history of lead in their residence, and the science and health impact of exposure to lead?”

Verbal screenings become a bigger problem, he added, “in communities with an over-concentration of those living in poverty, immigrants and with limited English proficiency.”

He also cited a recent study by Quest Diagnostics in upstate Syracuse that found 40 percent of children living in specific ZIP codes had blood lead levels between 5 and 10 micrograms per deciliter, while 16 percent had levels exceeding 10 micrograms per deciliter. Experts say there is no safe blood lead level.

Among other measures, Sepúlveda’s legislation calls for:

- No more than a two-year gap in testing in ZIP Codes which the State Department of Health identifies as high risk communities for lead poisoning.
- Expands the State’s Home Visiting Program from current mother, infant wellness visits to do environmental evaluations.

“These processes must take into account the new science of exposure thresholds, the changing face of our communities and their language and education levels,” said Senator Sepúlveda. “We need to ensure that more children are tested - and into older age -to ensure that no child is left out of these screenings and denied services to stop the environmental conditions that will destroy their health and lives.”

Responding to the Senator’s legislation, Dr. Elena Rios, President & CEO of the National Hispanic Medical Association, said “These issues need to be addressed not just in New York State, but in other cities and towns across the nation, especially in

older inner-cities where lead poisoning is a critical issue for children.”

"It's just terrible that so many of our children continue to be sickened and their lives destroyed by lead poisoning when there are obvious steps that can easily be taken to save them," said Wallace Diamond, President of the McKinley Houses Tenants Association. "Please, pass this legislation!"

"We continue to learn about lead exposure and the serious harm it presents. This new legislation is critical to public health as it expands testing to vulnerable communities-- under-served areas, communities of color, immigrant neighborhoods and others. Public health means public health-- all the public. With this law we come closer to serving all the people." Judith Cutchin, RN, New York State Nurses Association Board Member and President, NYSNA's H+H/Mayorals Executive Council

"Our office fully endorses the Senator's health care initiatives," said Amy Polan, Administrator of Parkchester Medical Services. "Regarding the lead testing bill as being proposed, we want to remind the community that any parent can bring their child into our office for a simple blood test, covered by all medical and commercial insurance plans."

"With so many children going undiagnosed, this is a serious problem for so many communities across the state, including ours," said Abdus Shahid, President of the Bangladesh Society of the Bronx and Vice President of the Parkchester Jame Masjid.

"Thank you, Senator Luis Sepúlveda, for putting together this bill which will help all children, and more immigrant and children who live in poor neighborhoods." - Mohammed Mujumder, President of the Bangladesh-American Community Council.

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Senator Sepúlveda's 32<sup>nd</sup> Senate District includes Parkchester, Castle Hill, Soundview, West Farms, Park Stratton, Hunts Point, Longwood, Concourse Village, Melrose, Morrisania, Mott Haven, Claremont, East Tremont, Unionport, Westchester Square, Bronx River, and Crotona Park East.