

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Addresses Recreational Lead Exposures

Idaho's Department of Health and Welfare uses a Health in All Policies approach to engage communities experiencing exposure to lead through recreational activities.

Background

Historically, Idaho has been the home for many mining and industrial smelting operations, totaling over 9,000 mining-related contaminated sites. It is also home to the Bunker Hill Mining and Metallurgical Complex Superfund Site, which has been classified by [EPA](#) as one of the largest historical mining districts in the world.

The soil, sediment, groundwater, and surface water near many mining sites can be contaminated with lead and other heavy metals, and exposure to lead-contaminated soil and dust are significant risk factors for elevated levels of lead in blood.

Over 60% of Idaho is public land, and this land is often used for recreational activities such as hunting, driving all-terrain vehicles, and shooting at outdoor gun ranges. Given the [popularity](#) of these activities (e.g., nearly 300,000 hunting licenses are sold annually), both children and adults can be at risk of lead exposure through contaminated lead in soil, dust, and ammunitions.

While Idaho has undertaken remediation efforts to reduce the lead exposure on public lands, there are still gaps in messaging and awareness of the risks of recreational lead exposures.

Steps Taken

Despite not having dedicated funding to support a statewide lead poisoning prevention program, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) took a targeted approach to engage stakeholders in an educational campaign aimed at preventing recreational lead exposure. IDHW is working with federal and state partners in the [Bureau of Land Management](#) and [Department of Fish and Game](#), as well as local public health districts, hunting and shooting organizations, and Boise State University to create and disseminate health communications resources around lead poisoning.

Through its partnerships, IDHW developed a series of factsheets on recreational sources of lead, including [wild game meat](#), [bullet reloading](#), [indoor gun ranges](#), and [outdoor gun ranges](#). Since developing these factsheets, IDHW has been working to share them with stakeholders and raise awareness about lead poisoning across communities in the state.

Results

As a result of IDHW's lead safe resource launch in 2020, the factsheets have received the attention of both national and local organizations. IDHW is successfully raising awareness of recreational lead exposure in Idaho and across other rural regions.

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare developed a series of factsheets on recreational sources of lead exposure, including:

- [Wild game meat](#)
- [Bullet reloading](#)
- [Indoor](#) and [outdoor](#) gun ranges

IDHW is successfully working to structure cross-sector relationships with agencies at the state and local level, as well as community organizations and interest groups. Given the limits of IDHW's regulatory authority, winning buy-in from partners was crucial to the success of the outreach campaign. IDHW worked closely with partners to understand needs and identify collaborative opportunities through a statewide lead advisory committee.

In addition to establishing new partnerships, IDHW synchronized its communications and developed consistent messaging across the campaign. [Messages](#) emphasize that there is no safe level of lead exposure and encourage people to recreate safely. IDHW also cautions that pregnant women and children have the highest lead risk levels and promotes the importance of blood lead screenings. By focusing on these at-risk populations, IDHW was able to ground its efforts in health equity while addressing gaps in lead poisoning awareness.

Lessons Learned

When developing communications for recreational lead poisoning prevention, IDHW framed their messages in a culturally sensitive lens. The health department understands the significance of these recreational activities, and thus chose to focus on safe use and harm reduction, which encouraged messaging uptake. Additionally, dissemination of these messages has been targeted primarily at rural communities to address some of the regional health disparities for lead poisoning in the state.

Next Steps

IDHW had to adapt its approach due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To be flexible, IDHW has been exploring virtual alternatives for holding community and partner meetings to disseminate the resources it has developed until in-person trainings are practical again. IDHW also has plans to conduct trainings for owners and operators of gun ranges, as well as for hunting enthusiasts, to share safety tips on preventing lead exposure from bullet casings and firearms. IDHW continues to work closely with its partner agencies to share lead safe resources and identify effective strategies to reach the public.

For additional information, visit IDHW's [lead web page](#) or [contact](#) IDHW's Indoor Environment Program.

Acknowledgments

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