

MEDIA RELEASE – 3rd December 2010

Radical new policy on prevention of lead poisoning

[A new policy on lead poisoning](#) has been developed by The LEAD Group, aimed at the National Medical Research Council of Australia (NHMRC).

The policy is for adoption by NHMRC, which would then recommend it to National and State health ministers. It is supported by an impressive [47 page background document](#) which provides the weight of evidence (including 12 pages of references) to convince the NHMRC to improve on its current policy.

The policy is a radical departure from the practice of setting ‘goals’ and ‘targets’ for blood lead levels. Instead, it proposes ‘individual action levels’ for anyone with a blood lead level exceeding that of 95% (the 95th percentile) of others in their population group.

The starting point for the new policy is the present ‘world’s best practice’ adopted by Germany in April 2010.

Under the German policy, selected sub-populations are tested for their blood lead levels. The level which 95% of those in the sub-populations are at or below becomes the target for the remaining 5% of that sub-population to achieve.

The Germans do a blood lead study and then ensure, through action for those individuals in the top 5% of blood leads, to gradually bring their blood lead down to a safer level.

Their current action level for children is around one third of the goal anywhere else, including in Australia, and less than one quarter of the action level in NSW and Victoria.

The LEAD Group calls on Australia to be the first country to use the German approach to protect workers from lead.

The proposed policy for Australia makes no distinction between lead workers and others, by calling for new occupational blood lead action levels, also based on the 95th percentile for the particular lead occupation. Currently, workers are permitted to have five times the blood lead level of a member of the general public before any action is taken. A proposed long-term study of lead workers would likely verify US research findings that correlate lead exposure with early death.

Amongst the many proposals: that vets be educated to the fact that a pet with lead poisoning is the ‘canary in the mine’ for the household where the pet lives; that doctors be asked to use a questionnaire to decide which of their patients should be tested for lead.

The policy recommends research into the effectiveness of pectin, Vitamin C and other ‘lead-clawing therapies’, which drag lead out of the body. Determining the effectiveness of such therapies has the potential to help millions to live longer and healthier lives. All of us older than 8 years were exposed to the Australian lead that goes into leaded petrol and still goes into AvGas.

The current NHMRC policy ([Public Statement](#)) sets a blood lead goal but requires no action on the part of public authorities or the medical establishment to achieve it. *The LEAD Group’s model policy requires action.*

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