## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 12 | **Name:** | Katherine Cortes |
| **Proposed No**.: | PM 2016-0421 | **Date:** | August 31, 2016 |

**SUBJECT**

The proposed motion would offer the King County Council’s support for measures to preventing lead poisoning in King County, in alignment with the King County Board of Health’s Resolution 16-07.

**SUMMARY**

Public Health – Seattle & King County (Public Health) staff have briefed both the King County Board of Health (on July 21, 2016) and this committee (on June 21, 2016) on risks of lead exposure in King County. These staff indicate that “investing in the prevention of lead exposure will yield improvements in the health of our communities, especially for children.”

The Board of Health adopted Resolution 16-07 (July 21, 2016) calling for meaningful actions to address lead poisoning and support for efforts to eliminate lead poisoning in King County. The proposed motion would echo this Resolution and would declare the support of the King County Council for the same actions articulated in Resolution 16-07:

* calling on federal and state lawmakers to take meaningful action to address lead poisoning;
* encouraging and exploring requiring all King County health care providers to adopt Washington State Department of Health guidance for lead screening of all children at ages twelve and twenty-four months; and
* updating the occupational lead standards for lead in Washington state to provide greater protection for workers and their families.

**BACKGROUND**

Public Health – Seattle & King County (Public Health) staff have briefed both the King County Board of Health (on July 21, 2016) and this committee (on June 21, 2016) on risks of lead exposure in King County. They report that exposure to lead is a significant health concern, especially for young children and infants, whose exposures generally occur in their home and whose growing bodies absorb proportionally more lead than adults. They further report that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention assert that the health effects of lead exposure may include learning disabilities, decreased IQ, behavioral problems, decreased physical growth, and other health and wellness issues.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Public Health staff state that adults are mostly exposed to lead in their workplaces, often at levels that far exceed those that are considered safe by public health standards, and may inadvertently take lead home with them and expose their children and other family members. They characterize the risk of lead exposure as disproportionately affecting communities of color and socioeconomically disadvantaged adults and children– in King County and across the country – because of where these individuals live (poorly maintained housing) and work (high exposure industrial facilities and construction jobs).

Public Health staff have reported that the department is addressing lead poisoning in several ways. Primary strategies include providing assistance to lead-poisoned families, supporting and participating in the update of regulatory occupational health standards to reflect current science, and supporting residents to take actions to reduce and prevent exposure. Executive staff indicate that “investing in the prevention of lead exposure will yield improvements in the health of our communities, especially for children.”

Public Health staff further report that Governor Inslee developed an action agenda (released May 2, 2016) for the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) effort to reduce lead exposures and ensure that at-risk children receive testing and the necessary follow-up care. These efforts are rooted in the knowledge that preventing lead poisoning is a foundational public health service.

Per Public Health, data describing childhood lead exposure in Washington state are limited, and a more rigorous health surveillance effort would help better define the extent of the problem. They report that funding cuts at DOH’s Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program have hampered the ability to determine how many children are tested for lead exposure. However, it is estimated that the annual screening rate for children of 72 months of age and younger is 2.5% (data from 2007-2012). This is significantly lower than the national screening rate of 15.9% during the same period. Of those tested, approximately 2.6% had BLLs at or above the current reference level of 5 µg/dL. Nationally the incidence rate of childhood lead poisoning is 6.6%. Assuming the national rate of lead poisoning, an estimated 8,511 children in King County (data from 2014) may have BLLs at or above 5 µg/dL.

With regard to adult exposure, Public Health staff report that current state and federal standards put workers and their families at risk. In briefing the Board of Health, they stated: “In Washington State, safety and health regulations are based on rules created by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) of 1973 empowers L&I to create and enforce rules and allows Washington rules to be more stringent than OSHA’s. Both the state and federal standards are based on the level of scientific knowledge about lead toxicity available in the 1970s and do not reflect the current understanding of lead’s health effects. In 2012-2013, Public Health petitioned the Governor and L&I to update Washington State’s occupational lead standards. In response to Public Health’s petitions, L&I started a stakeholder process to develop recommendations to update their outdated occupational lead standards. As of June 2016, L&I has convened five stakeholder meetings. L&I also started the formal standard revision process in April 2016 when they filed a Preproposal Statement of Inquiry (CR101) to change state law.”

**ANALYSIS**

The proposed motion cites information provided by Public Health – Seattle and King County regarding the risks of lead exposure in King County and would declare the support of the King County Council for three actions articulated in Resolution 16-07 (passed by the Board of Health on July 21, 2016). These actions are as follows:

* calling on federal and state lawmakers to take meaningful action to address lead poisoning;
* encouraging and exploring requiring all King County health care providers to adopt Washington State Department of Health guidance for lead screening of all children at ages twelve and twenty-four months; and
* updating the occupational lead standards for lead in Washington state to provide greater protection for workers and their families.

These actions are within the authority of the Council and are recommended by Public Health as appropriate next steps to mitigate lead exposure risk in King County. There is no anticipated fiscal impact for this legislation.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Proposed Motion 2016-0421
2. Board of Health Resolution 16-07

**INVITED**

1. Patty Hayes, Director, Public Health – Seattle and King County

1. Board of Health 16-B13 Staff Report, July 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)