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Planned Lead Azide Detonation: Exposure and Testing

Health Alert

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- The U.S. Army plans to conduct a controlled detonation of degrading lead azide at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant in Middletown on **Wednesday, November 25, 2026, at 9 a.m. CST**. The primary health concern is exposure to lead through breathing airborne particles or swallowing particles that settle on hands, toys, food, or other surfaces. Children younger than 6 years and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding may be at greater risk of harm from lead exposure.
- The Army's November 24 advisory recommends temporary evacuation for all Middletown residents and those in a five-mile cone extending southwest of the ammunition plant (i.e., **evacuation zone**). The army has also modeled where lead particles could travel in the air and where they could settle on surfaces (i.e., **other affected areas**). These models may change with the weather. Maps detailing the evacuation zone and additional affected areas are expected to be posted here: https://www.army.mil/asc#org-iowa-army-ammunition-plant
- **Post-detonation environmental sampling will help determine where lead exposure might have occurred and where ongoing risk (if any) is highest. Iowa HHS will use these findings to update blood lead testing recommendations as needed throughout the response.**

What clinicians should do

- A patient may have exposure without immediate symptoms. Asymptomatic patients concerned about possible exposure can be assessed as an outpatient.
- Identify **exposure**, which can occur in the evacuation zone or other affected areas by breathing in lead-containing dust while the plume passes or by swallowing dust after it settles.
- If evaluating a patient concerned about exposure after detonation, ask where the patient was. Record the location and time, including work, school, childcare, or travel. Ask whether the patient was outdoors during the airborne exposure period, working in the area, or later handled dusty items or played in potentially affected soil. For a child, ask if whether dusty hands/objects went into their mouth.
- Use the event-specific criteria below to determine who needs a blood lead test. For help interpreting a blood lead result, call the Iowa Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 (available 24 hours a day).

Testing priority by symptoms, exposure, and population risk

- Priority 1: blood lead testing should be pursued within 48 hours of exposure
  - Anyone with symptoms consistent with acute lead poisoning. Include blood lead testing as part of a complete clinical workup.
  - Asymptomatic children <6 years of age with exposure
  - Asymptomatic pregnant women with exposure
  - Asymptomatic children and adults with potential exposure to lead particles from this event who have pica or frequently bring their hands or objects to their mouths
- Priority 2: blood lead testing should be pursued within 1 week of exposure
  - Asymptomatic individuals 6 years or older with exposure

Follow Iowa HHS guidance for venous confirmation of an elevated capillary blood lead level (https://hhs.iowa.gov/media/16413/download). A confirmed elevation may reflect exposure to lead dust from the detonation, other sources, or both. Review possible sources with the patient and reinforce handwashing and wet-cleaning guidance. All blood lead results for Iowa residents must be reported to Iowa HHS. If a result is elevated, specific actions should be taken. For example, public health staff may call the patient to discuss possible sources and ways to reduce further exposure.