



**Riverside County
Public Health**

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Riverside County health officials offer program to curtail childhood lead poisoning

Standing in the kitchen of her two-story home in the San Geronio Pass, the young mother looked at her 17-month-old son, Jose, and smiled as she watched him play and laugh. The boy looked the picture of health, running from one adult to the next, playing tag with anyone who would pay attention.

The mother's expression changed moments later as she recalled the news she received months ago that the child had dangerous levels of lead in his blood and the source of the hazardous material was likely the clay pots that she had used to prepare his food. In long-term cases, lead poisoning can affect mental and physical development, and symptoms can include general fatigue, muscle soreness, weight loss, vomiting and irritability.

"I could not imagine that," said the woman, glancing at the cooking items laid out on her dining room table. "I had no idea."

Jose's high lead levels were detected earlier this year during a routine physical and he was referred to the state Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, which is operated by the Riverside County Department of Public Health. Jose is doing better and his blood tests are

normal. His case is one of many being highlighted as health officials prepare to celebrate Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, Oct. 25-31.

Once a child is found to have high levels of lead, the family is assigned a team of health workers, including a public health nurse, health services assistant and an environmental professional. The work involves a home visit, which in Jose's case discovered the clay pots that contained lead. The boy did not show signs of lead poisoning. None of Jose's siblings showed symptoms of lead poisoning and their blood tests were normal.

"I was so happy that none of the other children were in danger," the mother said. "It turned out well."

The case workers also educate parents and guardians about the importance of proper nutrition, good hand hygiene and how certain vitamins can help reduce lead levels. The countywide program is free and has helped hundreds of families over the years it has been in place.

"This program protects the most important asset we have: children," said Susan Harrington, director for the county health department. "By taking steps now, we are helping to protect these children from years of physical and mental deficits that can be caused by lead poisoning."

For more information about the lead program, please visit <http://www.rivcoclpp.org/>.