

Healthy Housing Kids Drive Up Fair: Get the Lead Out

For Tasha Garrett it all started when her two-year-old son was diagnosed with lead poisoning. She was a first-time mom and was living in a home in the southeast side of Grand Rapids, Michigan in the 49507 zip code.

“I took him to a doctors’ appointment and that’s where we found out he had alarming levels of lead in his system, and I was so surprised.”

That was nearly twenty-four years ago, but for Tasha the impact of finding out how poisoned her son was with lead has made a lasting impact.

Today Tasha has partnered with Tabitha Williams to create an educational fair for families residing in Grand Rapids’ 49507 zip code. The same zip code with the highest rate of children with lead poisoning in Michigan and where the majority of residents identify themselves as Black or Latinx living with limited income.

“A lot of parents are not aware of how lead poisoning occurs. Lead can be found everywhere -- hidden in plain sight -- from the chipping paint outside a home to the dust corners of a windowsill,” Tasha says.

Dipping his fingers in the corner of a windowsill and putting them in his mouth is how Tasha’s son first became poisoned with lead.

“Lead tastes a little bit sweet and my son who was doing very developmentally appropriate behavior like putting his hands into his mouth was also slowly putting small particles of lead in his system,” she says.

That knowledge is what Tasha and Tabitha are sharing with 150 families at the drive up fair taking place in the parking lot of Healthy Homes in the heart of the 49507 zip code.

“Children are at home a lot more because the daycares are closed, and the schools are closed” Tasha explains. “We wanted to make sure that we let the homes in the 49507 zip code know that their children are more susceptible because they are at home longer than they may have been in previous years.”

The fair provides learning opportunities for parents from 49507 residents like Tasha who have been directly impacted by lead poisoning as well as lead sample kits to help families identify places in their home where high levels of lead may be hiding.

“Lead wipes will be provided to families along with a dust wipe sample to test for lead hazards in the home,” Tasha says.

Tasha believes lead poisoning is 100% preventable -- and part of the solution lies in awareness and education for those living in homes where lead hasn’t been stripped away.

“Lead poisoning can have long lasting effects in our communities from learning disabilities to ADHD and we need to make sure that parents and caretakers are aware of

these effects and how to prevent them -- and that's exactly what we are doing -- getting the lead out with awareness and education.”