

\$2.7M Grant to Study Lead Exposure in Latino Children

The study will observe the impact of lead exposure on young Latinos' learning and behavior in school.

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The Program in Public Health at the University of California, Irvine, (UCI) was awarded a five-year, \$2.7 million grant by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences to study the impact of lead exposure during pregnancy on early childhood and children's school performance, according to a [UCI news release](#).

Lead exposure can seriously harm children's health. Even low levels of [lead exposure](#) can negatively affect learning outcomes, attention span and academic achievement, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). What's more, Latino, Black and low-income children over age 5 in the United States are disproportionately exposed to lead compared with non-Latino white children from higher-income families.

The grant will fund a new study led by researchers Jun Wu, PhD, UCI professor of environmental and occupational health, Alana LeBrón, PhD, UCI assistant professor of health, society and behavior, and Chicano/Latino studies and Patricia Flores, director of Orange County Environmental Justice.

"Our overarching goal is to analyze the link between lead exposure and children's academic performance and neurobehavioral outcomes, identify risk factors of current lead exposure, improve childhood lead screening and intervention, and—most importantly—develop and implement a public health equity action plan," Wu [told UCI](#).

In 2020, Santa Ana, California, [lead contamination in the city's soil gave rise to a crisis](#) that disproportionately affected lower-income households and people of color. The new study aims to recruit 600 7- to 10-year-old Santa Ana schoolchildren.

Researchers will determine early and current levels of exposure to lead and other metals using baby teeth and blood as biomarkers. Using the biomarker data, researchers will review school records to analyze academic performance use data from surveys to assess behavioral indicators, such as aggressive behavior, attention problems, anxiety/depression, rule breaking, social issues and other mental health issues, according to UCI.

“A crucial component of a successful and effective community-academic partnership is to disseminate the knowledge we develop together to equip community members to advocate for structural changes to improve their health and well-being,” said LeBrón. “Our public health equity action plan is intended to raise awareness of the health and academic implications of lead exposure and mitigation strategies.”

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