

BRIGHT CITIES: Jackson, MS

Jackson Works with Residents to Mitigate Lead and to Transition to Baby-Safe Cleaners



Jackson keeps resources directed to high-impact, community-led interventions

Mississippi has suffered from racial injustices for centuries. And, since the early 1900s, babies and children in Mississippi—including the capital city of Jackson—have had higher cases of lead poisoning.

Recently, Mississippi [showed the tenth-highest number of children](#) with high lead levels, and the single largest jump from 2009 to 2015, from 3% to 6% of children testing “high.”

Exposures to lead and other toxic chemicals create barriers to learning, speaking, and motor skill development. Many Jackson residents have taken a stand to protect residents and children—because removing lead from water is not only beneficial for babies, but for everyone in the community.



“No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement. And the effects of lead exposure cannot be corrected.”

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

BRIGHT CITY: JACKSON, MS

CONCERNS:

- Lead exposures for kids
- Inadvertent contributions to toxic exposures at childcare centers

PROJECT OUTPUT:

- Collected >215 survey responses from childcare providers
- Found 33% of mothers and guardians weren't aware of how to protect their children from lead
- Childcare center retrofit with new paint and learning about how to go toxic-free

KIDS POTENTIALLY IMPACTED:

- More than 11,400 kids under 5 years old live in Jackson

Healthy Babies Bright Futures' Bright Cities Program works with Cities to Protect Babies' Brain Development

The Bright Cities program gives grants up to \$35,000 to city governments and community-based partners to equitably reduce their community's exposures to neurotoxic chemicals that interfere with all babies' brain development.

Why? 1 in 6 children in America have a neurological disability including autism, IQ loss, learning or behavioral problems, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and speech or cognitive delays.¹ While toxic chemicals are not the sole cause for lifelong learning and developmental deficits, they are among the most preventable.

Bright Cities works with mayors and city leaders to design the most effective strategies for a city. Benefits to being a Bright City extend beyond reducing neurotoxic exposures. Being a Bright City elicits positive responses from city residents. It provides an opportunity to leverage national funding and set the stage for sustainable equitable change. And it provides a fresh opportunity for cities to ensure that all babies have equitable, just and healthy environments.

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“As a city that looks to make radical change to address the concerns that we have, we must recognize that our most precious resource is our children. We will do all that we can to protect them.”

Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba, Jackson, Mississippi

Two dynamic partners came together to tackle lead exposure issues in Jackson—the City of Jackson and a community based organization called OneVoice. One Voice seeks to magnify voices of traditionally silenced communities in the South, and build a foundation to address oppressions present in significant institutions serving adults and children.

The City and OneVoice set out to determine how to make changes to reduce the exposures to chemicals that harm babies’ brain development.

Their first step was to understand residents’ current perspectives. The team surveyed mothers, expecting mothers, or guardians about what they do at home to prevent exposure to lead poisoning and to other neurotoxic chemicals like cleaning products, household pesticides, and others. The survey was conducted primarily at local daycare and Head Start programs and [is available here](#).

Over 215 caregivers responded to the survey! **Thirty-three percent of those that responded were not aware of how to protect their children from lead**, and 37% of recipients were uncertain whether their child had been tested for neurotoxic chemicals, including lead.

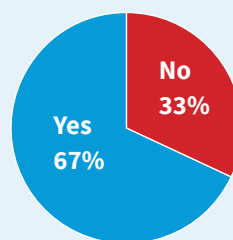
In response, OneVoice organized a webinar at North Jackson Elementary School to talk with caregivers about how to breastfeed during COVID and how to reduce children’s exposure to lead and other neurotoxic chemicals. Kimberly Ramsey, the state breastfeeding coordinator from the WIC Program, led the discussion. OneVoice hosted a second webinar with North Jackson Elementary School to discuss lead poisoning prevention and Healthy Homes Program led by Jacqueline Crosland. OneVoice also shared information with residents about how to keep the home clean with non-toxic supplies on hand.

In tandem, the City of Jackson designed and included an insert with “Healthy Baby Tips” for all water utility bill customers.

CAREGIVERS SURVEY

Are you aware of how to protect your child from lead?

193 responses





“This project sparked action to continue environmental justice work that reduces the risk of health disparities amongst children. We are now working with different entities in Mississippi to lessen infant mortality rates, lead contamination, and now COVID.”

Catherine Robinson, Program Manager at OneVoice

OneVoice also shared practical strategies to reduce toxics in childcare settings with Jacob’s Ladder Center for Learning I and II, a local daycare center serving over 100 children. Staff liked the easy-to-implement and low-cost checklist that concisely describes actions to reduce neurotoxic exposures. The grant also supported new paint to replace chipped paint.

“We learned a lot from this project to help our children thrive further,” said Linda Stuckey, the daycare owner. “We plan to share this learning with parents and other providers in our network.”

Moving forward, the team will provide cleaning products and school supplies to North Jackson Elementary School and continue the community outreach education campaign related to healthy cooking and cleaning so that all children in Jackson have the healthiest start in life.

FOR YOUR BATHROOM

Green Cleaning Products

While there are many household cleaning products available in your local supermarket or discount store, you may see some surprising ingredients if you read the label closely. Many of these products have harmful chemicals. It is risky to have these chemicals in your home in case someone accidentally drinks or touches them. Breathing the fumes of some chemicals, especially over time, can be bad for your health. Also, small amounts of these products might be left on surfaces or in the air, which affects your home's air quality. You can avoid these chemicals by making your own, safe cleaning products. For most of these recipes, you will need:

Items Need:

- Baking Soda
- Liquid Oil Soap (like Murphy's)
- White Vinegar
- Water

Tub and Sink Cleaner:

What you need:

- Baking Soda
- Liquid Oil Soap

Steps:

1. Sprinkle on baking soda and rub with a wet rag.
2. Add a little soap to the rag for more cleaning power.
3. Rinse surfaces well to avoid leaving a film.

Window and Mirror Cleaners:

What you need:

- White Vinegar
- Water

Steps:

1. Pour 1/4 cup of white vinegar in a spray bottle and fill to the top with water.
2. Spray on surfaces and wipe with a lint-free rag.
3. For Outdoor Windows - Use a sponge and wash with warm water with a few drops of liquid oil soap. Rinse well with a squeegee and dry.

Drain Cleaner:

What you need:

- Baking Soda
- White Vinegar
- Boiling Water

Steps:

1. Pour 1/2 cup of baking soda down the drain first, add 1/2 cup vinegar after.
2. Let it fizz for 10 - 15 minutes.
3. Pour down a teakettle full of boiling water. Repeat if necessary.
4. If clog is stubborn, use a plunger or a mechanical snake

Toilet Bowl Cleaner:

What you need:

- Baking Soda

Steps:

1. Sprinkle baking soda in and around toilet bowl.
2. Let sit for a few minutes, then scrub clean.

“I have three children, and I’m a clean freak. As part of our partnership with OneVoice, I learned about the advantages of nontoxic cleaners. They work great, often cost less, and are especially helpful if you have people in the home with allergies and sensitivities. My home has both.”

Mrs. Monique Simmons,
PTA President of the North Jackson Elementary School



OneVoice’s communications team member Deante Morgan compiled recipes for nontoxic cleaners that can be made with commonly available items. The recipes were shared on with Jackson childcare centers, on social media, and in newsletters. Residents loved them! Share them next time you exchange holiday recipes.

PLAYBOOK TO CREATE HIGH-IMPACT, COMMUNITY-LED INTERVENTIONS

1

Engage with residents early and often, both in groups and individually.

Identify your issue—in Jackson it was too many kids with lead poisoning—and take steps to understand the community's perspective. To reach parents, staff surveyed local daycares, City of Jackson's Head Start programs, and target neighborhoods. This engagement strategy collected over 200 responses that were used to shape the project's trajectory.

2

Choose diverse public outreach strategies to widely disseminate information.

Design outreach campaigns to meet residents where they are. The Jackson team tackled issues of lead poisoning prevention, home non-toxic cleaning strategies, and COVID-19 safety using a combination of webinars, utility bill inserts, and public announcements on the city's municipal television station.

3

Work with individual leaders on exemplary projects.

City staff worked with a local daycare center to create a healthier environment with simple practices to reduce potential neurotoxic exposures and new paint. This retrofit is now a model for other daycare centers, and staff have the capacity to pass on this learning.

4

Be persistent.

Though our efforts took longer than expected—in a large part due to COVID and reduced staff capacity—we did our best to do a little bit each day. This slow but steady pace helped us achieve our goals.

Have questions about Jackson's actions?

Contact Catherine Robinson, Program Manager OneVoice, Jackson, Mississippi at crobinson@uniteonevoice.org or Jasmine Thigpen, Division Manager of Family and Youth Services, at jthigpen@jacksonms.gov.

Curious about funding and/or informational resources?

Contact Kyra Naumoff Shields, Bright Cities Program Director, at knaumoff@hbbf.org



The Bright Cities program provides grant funding for US cities and community based partner organizations to reduce exposures — in pregnant women and children under 2 years — to the nine neurotoxins with the strongest associations to developmental delay.¹ These neurotoxins are arsenic, flame retardants, lead, mercury, combustion byproducts called PAHs, banned industrial chemicals PCBs, organophosphate pesticides, a rocket fuel component and fertilizer contaminant called perchlorate, and plastic additives called phthalates.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Bennett D, Bellinger DC, Birnbaum LS, et al. Project TENDR: Targeting Environmental Neuro-Developmental Risks The TENDR Consensus Statement. *Environ Health Perspect.* 2016; 124(7):A118-A122