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February 5, 2024

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TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Barbara Ferrer, Ph.D., M.P.H, M.Ed. *Barbara Ferrer*
Director

SUBJECT: **REIMAGINING WHITEMAN AIRPORT
(ITEM 20, DIRECTIVE #3, NOVEMBER 7, 2023)**

This is in response to the November 7, 2023 motion by your Board directing the Department of Public Health (Public Health) to assess existing and available blood lead level data and air quality monitoring data surrounding Whiteman Airport and make recommendations to further characterize ambient lead levels in the surrounding area. Findings will be shared with relevant regulatory authorities, including the California Department of Public Health and the Southern California Air Quality Management District, for further review to ensure the safety of residents living in proximity to Whiteman Airport.

**1) Assessment of existing and available blood lead level data
(Prepared in collaboration with the California Department of Public Health Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch)**

The California Department of Public Health Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch (CLPPB) performed an analysis of blood lead levels around the Whiteman Airport in Pacoima in response to a request made in a letter from the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Officer, pursuant to the Board's November 7, 2023 motion. The CEO letter, with input from Public Health, requested that CDPH conduct a study to assess statistical association between the blood lead levels of sampled children living within 1.5 miles of Whiteman Airport.

Methods

For this analysis, CLPPB reviewed lead data of children under 6 years old with blood lead levels (BLLs) equal to or greater than the CDC Blood Lead Reference Value (BLRV) of 3.5 mcg/dL by census tract for the years 2018-2022. This dataset includes the highest BLL per child per year, meaning a child who has been tested several years, will appear more than once in the dataset. Please note that the results of children's blood lead tests are confidential, and to ensure that confidentiality is maintained, CLPPB aggregated the blood lead test results to the census tract.

CLPPB completed the following to determine the percentages of BLLs equal to or greater than the CDC BLRV around the Whiteman Airport:

1. Identified the property boundaries of the Whiteman Airport using tax assessor parcel data.
2. Created a 1.5-mile buffer around the property boundaries, using the distance specified in the County’s letter per the Board motion.
3. Selected all census tracts that at least partially overlapped within the 1.5-mile buffer.
4. Calculated the overall percentage of BLLs equal to or greater than the CDC BLRV for the selected census tracts.
5. For comparison, the percentage of BLLs equal to or greater than the CDC BLRV for the rest of LA County was calculated.

Results

Results from the CLPPB analysis are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage of Children Under 6 Years Old with a Blood Lead Level equal to or greater than the CDC Blood Lead Reference Value of 3.5 mcg/dL in the Census Tracts within 1.5 Miles of the Whiteman Airport

Whiteman Census Tract Category	Number of census tracts	Number of children under 6 with a BLL of 3.5 mcg/dL or greater	Percent of children under 6 with a BLL of 3.5 mcg/dL or greater	Total number of children under 6 with a BLL*
Within 1.5 miles of Whiteman Airport	46	192	1.75%	11,002
Rest of Los Angeles County	2,455	10,470	2.26%	463,824

* Denotes total number of children tested
 See Footnote¹

Discussion

Based on the analysis completed by CLPPB, the percent of children under 6 years old with a blood lead level equal to or greater than the CDC Blood Lead Reference Value (BLRV) of 3.5 mcg/dL within 1.5 miles of Whiteman Airport is 1.75% compared to 2.26% for rest of Los Angeles County. Based on the analysis, it does not appear that there is an increase in the number of children under 6 years old within 1.5 miles of Whiteman Airport with blood lead levels equal or greater than the BLRV.

There are several considerations for interpreting the data presented in the CLPPB analysis including the following:

¹ Table 1 notes:

Data are from the RASSCLE surveillance database archive of 7/3/2023. Each individual is counted only once per year, using their highest blood lead level each year for 2018-2022. Measures are in micrograms per deciliter (µg/dL) of whole blood and include arterial, cord, venous, capillary, and unknown samples. Not all elevated capillary samples are confirmed by a follow-up venous sample. Results later determined to be false positives or errors have been excluded. All results of blood lead analyses are reportable under California law, and the State works to ensure complete reporting. Results that are not submitted to the State, however, would not be included here. Patient census tract is determined by geocoding patient address using Esri's Street Map Premium North America locator and spatially joining to a block group layer. Because 5 years' worth of data are being shown in this table, data are not suppressed, per the California Health and Human Services Agency's Data De-Identification Guidelines.

- The data used for this analysis area are home addresses aggregated by census tract, not individual home address. There are some census tracts that are not fully within the 1.5 mile buffer which results in children included in Table 1 as “Within 1.5 miles of Whiteman Airport” with home addresses outside of the 1.5-mile buffer.
- California does not have universal screening; only children meeting the current screening recommendations are tested which means that there are likely children under 6 years old around Whiteman Airport that were not tested for lead.
- Only children with valid home addresses reported by the laboratory were included in the analysis which means some children’s lab results may have been excluded.
- There is no safe level of lead in children’s blood. This analysis only categorizes BLLs as above or below the CDC’s BLRV (3.5 mcg/dL).

2) Assessment of the air quality monitoring data surrounding Whiteman Airport

Public Health completed a review of the [Whiteman Airport Lead Monitoring](#) conducted by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD). Air monitoring was conducted during two points in time. As part of the most recent [Multiple Air Toxics Exposure Study \(MATES V\)](#) between 2018 and 2019 SCAQMD gathered air measurements of several air toxic contaminants at Whiteman airport and found that ambient lead levels ranged from 0.4 ng/m³ to 19.7 ng/m³ with an average study value of 6.9 ng/m³. These results are considerably lower than the U.S. EPA Lead National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) of 150 ng/m³.

Additionally, SCAQMD conducted air sampling at and around Whiteman Airport between July and September 2022 to further characterize ambient lead levels in this area. According to the report, a variety of monitoring techniques including 24-hour samples, continuous sampling, and mobile monitoring were used. While piston-driven aircraft can be sources of lead, SCAQMD’s monitoring demonstrated lead to be within the typical range measured during MATES V and more than 10 times lower than the U.S. EPA national standard for lead.

In summary, while the SCAQMD’s data collection time periods are short, they match closely with the MATES V data which is collected for a year. The measured lead concentrations average for both the short-term and long-term studies is significantly lower than the US EPA standard of 150 ng/m³ (average concentrations were 10 times lower and peak measurement was 4 times lower). Ambient lead concentrations in the nearby community were similarly significantly lower than US EPA standards.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis completed by CLPPB, it does not appear that there is an increase in the number of children under 6 years old within 1.5 miles of Whiteman Airport with blood lead levels equal or greater than the BLRV. Further, based on air sampling completed by SCAQMD ambient lead concentrations near Whiteman were significantly lower than US EPA standards.

Additionally, moving forward with the recommendations outlined in the Department of Public Works [Re-envisioning Whiteman Airport Report](#) should be carefully considered. Following an extensive community engagement process a series of sound recommendations were developed such as prohibiting the sale, storage, and use of leaded aviation gas, pursuing the sales of unleaded fuel, and addressing noise, air

Each Supervisor
February 5, 2024
Page 4 of 4

quality, and other environmental impacts for residents. It is understood that implementation of recommendations may be dependent on the decision to pursue airport closure or continue with airport operations.

Attachment

BF:js

c: Chief Executive Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors