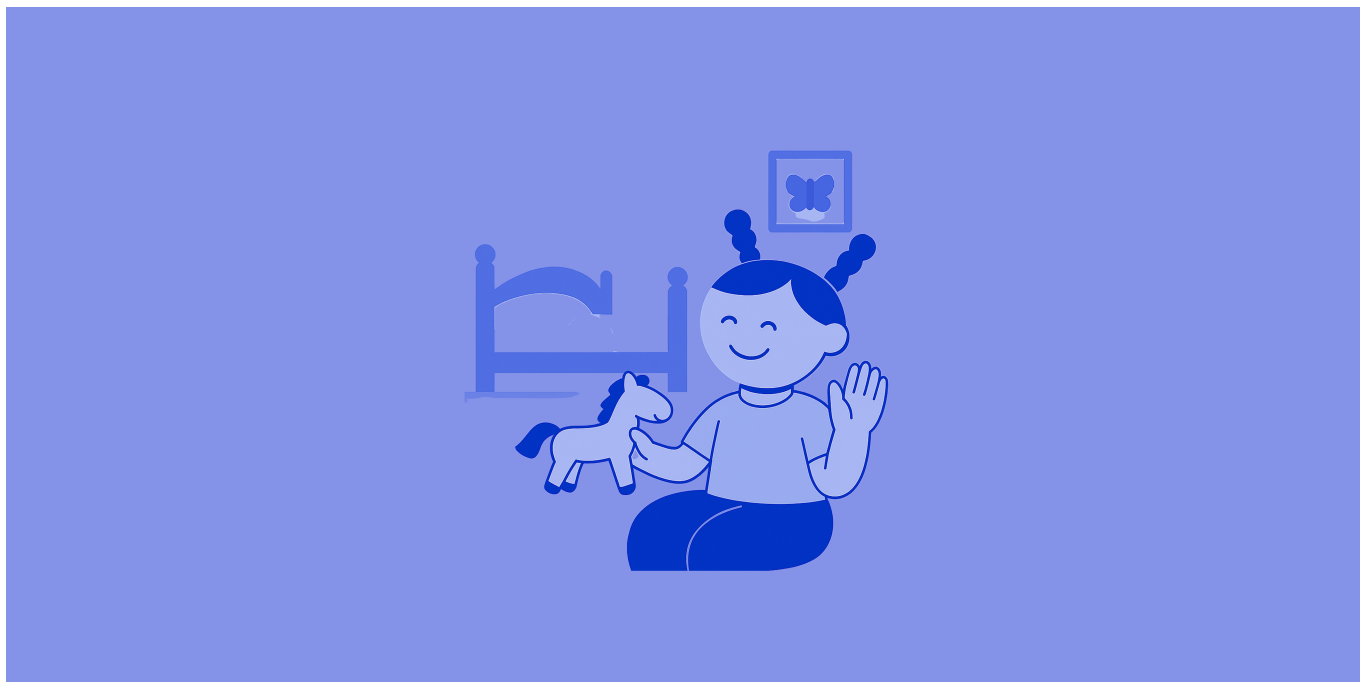




A SBC Message Guide for Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning

Using the REACH Framework

Lead poisoning presents unique communication challenges: it's an invisible threat that silently damages children's developing brains, with health impacts that may not appear for years. Unlike visible environmental hazards, lead contamination requires specialized approaches to help communities recognize risks and take protective action.

Effective lead poisoning prevention messaging must bridge the gap between an imperceptible danger and concrete daily behaviours. This requires careful consideration of how messages are crafted to make abstract risks tangible, motivate action among competing priorities and enable families to protect their children with practical, feasible steps. This guide offers a practical approach to crafting lead poisoning prevention messages using the REACH framework, a social and behaviour change (SBC) messaging model. It is written for global use and should be adapted to local contexts before implementation. Wherever possible, conduct research – such as a knowledge, attitudes and practices study, social listening or rapid stakeholder interviews – to inform your strategy. This will help account for cultural norms, language and literacy, trusted messengers and the current level of awareness in your audience. For example, UNICEF conducted a global social community listening study on children’s environmental health to inform the REACH framework, with a focus on air pollution, extreme heat and lead poisoning in five countries. SBC is one pillar of a broader communication strategy to end childhood lead poisoning. It bridges the gap between technical risk information and the daily decisions made by individuals – turning insights on invisible hazards into clear actions. This guide centres on caregivers, but the same principles can be adapted for other audiences. For content aimed at additional audiences and advocacy purposes – such as policymakers or health workers – see **Tool 5: Clear communication to prevent and address childhood lead poisoning**. This guide forms part of the Toolkit to End Childhood Lead Poisoning, a primer on identifying, assessing and mitigating exposure. It is recommended to position SBC within the broader communication ecosystem – media relations, advocacy, risk communication and partner communications – so approaches are complementary rather than stand-alone.

Access the Message guide here:

Core principles for lead messaging

The REACH framework applies to messaging on childhood lead poisoning because of the four following reasons:

2.1 Address the invisibility challenge

- Make the invisible visible: Lead contamination cannot be seen, smelled or tasted – creating a fundamental perception barrier
- Convert abstract risks into tangible impacts: For example, instead of ‘parts per million’, use ‘affects reading ability/lowers IQ’
- Use concrete visualizations: Images like ‘Lead dust sticks to hands like invisible glue’ make the issue tangible
- Create mental models: Help families understand exposure pathways

2.2 Balance threat and efficacy

- Sufficient threat perception: Make risks immediate without causing paralysis
- High efficacy messaging: Emphasize that protective actions work
- Present hope alongside concern: Match every risk with a specific protection

2.3 Cultural and contextual adaptation

- Use trusted messengers: Community health workers, religious leaders, respected mothers
- Leverage cultural values: Family responsibility, child protection, community care
- Address specific practices: Traditional medicines, cookware and cosmetics, occupational exposure

2.4 Emphasize prevention and early action

- Prevention focus: Empower parents to take concrete protective action rather than dwelling on the permanence of damage that could occur
- Small actions matter: Emphasize efficacy of attainable measures, e.g., “Each meal with iron and calcium competes with lead absorption.”
- Multiple sources: Address all sources and the exposure pathways in your context

The REACH framework’s first three components can be applied flexibly in message development:

- As individual focus areas for specific messages targeting particular barriers
- As integrated elements within comprehensive messages
- As a sequence for campaign development over time

3.1 Recognize “Making lead visible

Objective: Lead cannot be seen, smelled or tasted, presenting a fundamental perception challenge. This invisibility means families may live with dangerous lead exposure for years without awareness. The RECOGNIZE component transforms abstract contamination data into concrete, personally relevant risk information that families can act upon. It creates clear links between everyday objects (e.g., peeling paint, glazed pottery), exposure behaviours (e.g., hand-to-mouth activity, food storage) and specific outcomes (e.g., struggling in school, lost IQ points). It bridges the gap between scientific knowledge about lead hazards and community understanding, helping people identify where lead exists in their daily environment through vivid sensory details, and understand how exposure occurs and how it affects their children.

You can also access the [dangers of lead pollution on Internet of Good Things here](#).