IOWA | Health and Human Services

Date: November 24, 2026

Update: Planned Lead Azide Detonation – Public Health Guidance and Recommended Protective Actions

Summary

The U.S. Army Sustainment Command is planning a controlled, mitigated detonation of unstable, degraded lead azide at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant (IAAAP) in Middletown, Iowa, on **Wednesday, November 25, 2026, at approximately 9:00 a.m. CST.** For updated information about the planned detonation, visit **ASC Installation Community Notifications**. For updated resources from state agencies, visit Iowa Army Munitions Disposition Resources | Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

Public Health Risk Assessment

Lead is a toxic metal that can cause serious health effects. No safe level of lead exposure has been identified. Young children and pregnant women are at particular risk. The greatest potential risk is anticipated to be in areas closest to the detonation site, particularly within the downwind area. Federal authorities have recommended evacuation of residents within the designated evacuation zone.

Potential exposure to lead may occur through:

- Inhalation of airborne lead-containing particles during plume passage.
- Ingestion of lead-containing dust following deposition on soil and other surfaces.
- Subsequent contact with contaminated soil, dust, and surfaces.

Infants, children under six years of age, and pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to the adverse health effects of lead exposure. Individuals with chronic health conditions may be more vulnerable to the health effects of this event and may need additional help following recommendations to stay safe.

Unlike many sources of lead exposure that occur over prolonged periods, this detonation is anticipated to result in a relatively short-duration airborne exposure event. However, lead deposited on soil and other surfaces may create opportunities for continued exposure following the event.

Actual public health risk will depend on meteorological conditions, airborne lead concentrations, surface deposition, and individual exposure circumstances. Environmental monitoring results will be critical to assessing potential exposure risks following the detonation.

Evacuation and Protective Actions

Protective action recommendations, evacuation information, sheltering guidance, and impacted-area maps are being provided by the U.S. Army, FEMA, and local emergency management officials.

Residents should follow the most current guidance from those agencies, including any evacuation recommendations, shelter-in-place instructions, and notifications regarding return to impacted areas.

For evacuation assistance, lodging information, and questions about whether you are in an affected area, contact FEMA at **1-800-621-3362** or visit **DisasterAssistance.gov**.

The U.S. Army is providing updated air dispersion and surface deposition maps, along with official community notifications and operational updates. Because conditions may change, residents and community partners should refer to the latest information from the U.S. Army and emergency management officials.

Environmental Monitoring

EPA and the U.S. Army have stated that environmental monitoring and sampling will occur before, during, and after the detonation. Environmental monitoring results and information about any available sampling assistance will be communicated by the responsible federal agencies as they become available.

Iowa HHS will continue coordinating with state and federal partners and reviewing available environmental data to help inform public health recommendations.

Public Health Recommendations Before and During the Detonation

Individuals within potentially impacted areas who are outside the designated evacuation zone should follow official shelter-in-place recommendations.

Iowa HHS recommends the following protective actions:

- Keep windows and doors closed for 24–48 hours after the detonation as a precaution, unless updated official guidance indicates otherwise. Minimize outdoor air intake and place heating and cooling systems in recirculation mode, when safe and feasible. Heating systems may remain operational.
- Temporarily turn off nonessential exhaust fans that increase outdoor air infiltration, when safe to do so.
- Consider replacing furnace filters before the detonation and using a MERV 11 or higher-rated filter, if compatible with the system.
- Consider using portable HEPA air cleaners.
- Keep children and pets indoors.
- Avoid unnecessary outdoor activities and travel through potentially impacted areas.
- If travel is necessary, keep vehicle windows closed and set ventilation systems to recirculate.
- Protect livestock feed and water from potential dust deposition.
- Contact a healthcare provider if concerned about lead exposure or related health effects.

Particular attention should be given to infants, young children, pregnant women, older adults, individuals with chronic health conditions, and those who may require assistance implementing protective measures.

Individuals should continue to follow protective action recommendations until the U.S. Army issues an all-clear determination or updated official instructions are provided.

Post-Detonation Public Health Recommendations

Following the all-clear determination for airborne exposure, additional precautions may be necessary in areas of potential lead deposition.

Until environmental sampling results become available and additional guidance is issued, individuals within the potential deposition area should:

- Wet-clean indoor and outdoor surfaces that infants and children may contact, including toys, outdoor play equipment, tables, chairs, handrails, patios, decks, and windowsills.
- Avoid dry sweeping, leaf blowing, or other activities that may redistribute potentially contaminated dust.
- Wash hands frequently, particularly before eating or drinking.
- Remove shoes before entering the home to minimize tracking of soil and dust indoors.
- Limit children's contact with potentially contaminated bare soil and uncleaned outdoor play surfaces.
- Follow additional Iowa HHS recommendations regarding lead exposure prevention and cleanup as they become available.
- Lead exposure may not cause immediate symptoms. Blood lead testing is the only recommended method for evaluating potential exposure.
- Individuals concerned about exposure should contact their healthcare provider to discuss whether testing is appropriate.

The conclusion of the airborne exposure period does not necessarily indicate that precautions related to deposited lead dust are no longer necessary.

Federal officials have indicated that environmental assessment and response activities will continue beyond the detonation, including additional sampling and remediation where necessary.

Iowa HHS will evaluate available environmental findings to determine whether additional protective measures are necessary or whether existing precautions can be reduced or discontinued.

Recommendations for Healthcare Providers

Healthcare providers should anticipate questions from patients and families regarding potential lead exposure.

Iowa HHS recommends that healthcare providers:

- Reinforce official evacuation and protective action recommendations.
- Obtain an exposure history when evaluating patients with concerns, including geographic location during the detonation, time spent outdoors, adherence to protective measures, and potential contact with deposited dust or soil.
- Consider individual risk factors:
  - Age (children younger than six)
  - Pregnancy
  - Pica
  - Occupational exposure
  - Other existing sources of lead exposure
- Advise asymptomatic individuals without a history of significant suspected exposure that an emergency department visit or immediate blood lead testing is generally not necessary.
- Evaluate individuals with significant suspected exposures or concerning symptoms based on clinical judgment.
- Continue routine blood lead screening in accordance with existing recommendations.
- Continue reporting blood lead results in accordance with existing Iowa reporting requirements.
- Children younger than six and pregnant women warrant particular attention because of their increased vulnerability.
- Consult the Iowa Poison Control Center at **1-800-222-1222** for assistance with clinical evaluation, testing decisions, and management of suspected lead toxicity.

Patients experiencing severe symptoms, including respiratory distress, altered mental status, or seizures, should receive immediate medical evaluation.

Healthcare facilities should review emergency preparedness plans and coordinate with local emergency management agencies to minimize potential airborne exposure while maintaining required ventilation, infection prevention standards, and continuity of patient care.

Blood Lead Testing Recommendations

At this time, Iowa HHS is not recommending widespread event-related blood lead testing based solely on geographic proximity to the detonation site or residence within the modeled plume area.

Environmental sampling will be important in determining whether individuals may have experienced elevated lead exposure and whether additional blood lead testing is warranted.

As soil deposition sampling results and other environmental monitoring data become available, Iowa HHS, in coordination with state and federal public health partners, will develop geographically targeted, risk-based blood lead testing recommendations.

These recommendations will consider:

- Measured lead concentrations in soil and deposited dust.
- Geographic distribution and magnitude of lead deposition.
- Air monitoring results and potential inhalation exposure.
- Individual exposure history and opportunities for contact with contaminated environments.
- Duration and frequency of potential exposure.
- Age, pregnancy status, and other factors associated with increased vulnerability to lead exposure.

Additional guidance will address which populations should receive blood lead testing, recommended timing of testing, and appropriate clinical follow-up.

Federal HHS officials indicated during the November 24 press conference that federal public health support will continue following the detonation and that testing will be made available if determined necessary.

The absence of symptoms does not exclude lead exposure. Healthcare providers should not delay clinically indicated testing or treatment while awaiting additional public health recommendations.

Recommendations for Local Public Health and Emergency Management Agencies

Local public health agencies and emergency management agencies should coordinate activities to support community preparedness, implementation of protective actions, and post-detonation response.

Prior to the detonation:

- Monitor updated U.S. Army dispersion and deposition maps to identify potentially impacted communities and facilities.
- Reinforce official evacuation and shelter-in-place recommendations through established local communication channels.
- Coordinate with schools, child care facilities, long-term care facilities, healthcare providers, and other community partners regarding protective actions.
- Identify populations that may require additional assistance with evacuation, transportation, sheltering, or access to essential medications and medical equipment.
- Direct residents with evacuation-related questions and assistance needs to FEMA.

- Review plans for communicating changes in protective action recommendations and official all-clear notifications.

During the detonation and plume passage:

- Maintain situational awareness through official federal and state notifications.
- Reinforce protective actions and communicate changes to potentially impacted areas.
- Coordinate with first responders and essential personnel to minimize unnecessary exposure.
- Communicate emerging public health concerns, unmet community needs, and operational challenges through established state response coordination channels.

Following the detonation:

- Communicate official all-clear notifications and any remaining exposure prevention recommendations.
- Continue reinforcing precautions related to potential lead deposition until additional environmental information becomes available.
- Identify potentially impacted schools, child care facilities, playgrounds, residential areas, and other locations frequented by vulnerable populations that may warrant environmental assessment.
- Assist residents in accessing information regarding EPA environmental sampling assistance as additional details become available.
- Coordinate with Iowa HHS regarding environmental sampling findings, community concerns, and subsequent public health recommendations.
- Prepare to assist with communication and implementation of risk-based blood lead testing recommendations, if indicated by environmental sampling results.
- Maintain consistent messaging across healthcare providers, local public health agencies, emergency management agencies, and community partners.

Local agencies should distinguish between modeled projections and confirmed environmental sampling results when communicating potential health risks to residents.

Agricultural and Food Safety Considerations

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is coordinating with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) and other state and federal partners to assess potential impacts on agricultural producers.

During the November 24 press conference, USDA indicated that approximately 350 farms could potentially be impacted based on the anticipated plume direction. This estimate represents projected potential impacts and does not establish actual agricultural contamination.

USDA also indicated that it will continue coordinating with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration regarding food safety considerations and with agricultural partners regarding available resources and assistance.

Local public health and emergency management agencies should direct agricultural producers to IDALS and USDA for agricultural-specific guidance regarding livestock, feed, water, crops, and food production.

Ongoing Public Health Assessment and Federal Support

Iowa HHS continues to coordinate with CDC, ATSDR, ASPR, EPA, the U.S. Army, and other state and federal partners to assess potential public health impacts.

Federal HHS officials have indicated that public health response personnel will remain engaged following the detonation to support environmental data interpretation, public health communication, exposure assessment, testing, and other response activities as necessary.

Iowa HHS has requested CDC Epi-Aid assistance to support the public health assessment and response.

Post-detonation public health recommendations will be informed by actual environmental findings. If environmental monitoring demonstrates minimal or nondetectable event-related lead concentrations, considering the adequacy and sensitivity of sampling, protective measures may be substantially reduced or discontinued.

Conversely, if environmental sampling identifies areas of elevated lead concentrations, additional geographically targeted recommendations may be necessary.

Updated recommendations regarding exposure prevention, environmental cleanup, blood lead testing, and clinical follow-up will be communicated through established communication channels.

Additional Information and Resources

- U.S. Army – Current Maps, Public Advisories, and Detonation Updates
- Iowa HHS – Lead Exposure and Surveillance
- CDC – Clinical Guidance for Lead Exposure
- EPA – Actions to Reduce Potential Lead Exposure
- EPA – Learn About Lead
- FEMA – Disaster Assistance | 1-800-621-3362
- Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
- Iowa Poison Control Center | 1-800-222-1222