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## Lead prevalence in children’s blood in Georgia - results of the national survey unveiled

The lead component was measured for the first time in the framework of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), the largest household survey worldwide, conducted in Georgia between September and December 2018. For defining the lead level, samples of venous blood were collected from 1,578 children from 2-7 years of age across Georgia. The children were randomly selected and the blood samples were sent to the Italian National Institute of Health, one of the leading public health institutions in Europe, where they were analyzed by Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP MS), the most accurate method for lead testing.

According to the study findings, 25 per cent of children have blood lead levels between 5 - 10 µg/dL (micrograms per deciliter), indicating the slight increase and 16 per cent of children have blood lead levels of greater than or equal to 10 µg/dL.

There is no known level of lead exposure that is considered safe for human beings. Yet, a measurement of 5 micrograms per deciliter (µg/dL) of whole venous blood is the reference level at or above which the WHO and USA Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend initiating public health actions.

“UNICEF in partnership with nine other donor organizations supported the Government of Georgia, specifically GeoStat and the NCDC, in carrying out the survey to define the magnitude of the problem”, says Gottfried Hanne, UNICEF Deputy Representative in Georgia. “We appreciate the acknowledgment of the problem by the Government, as well as the Government’s strong commitment to undertake efforts to develop short-term and long-term response strategies and actions. Identification of the sources of lead exposure should be the next step in addressing the problem”, added Hanne.

The MICS was implemented in Georgia by the National Statistics Office (GeoStat) with technical and financial support from United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) and Italian National Institute of Health (ISS). Significant contribution to the survey are also provided by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), French Development Agency (AFD), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank.

