Objective. Blood lead levels have declined among every age group in the United States, but urban minority residents remain at disproportionate risk for elevated lead levels. Our objective was to measure lead burden in young women of childbearing age in New York City. We also describe successful means of recruiting this population into a cohort study. Material and methods. Healthy women aged 18-25 attending a New York City health care center in 1995-1998 were eligible for participation. Participants were recruited by health care providers, the study coordinator and the participants themselves. Venous blood samples were obtained for whole blood lead, ferritin and hematocrit measurements, and detailed questionnaires were administered. Results. 239 women have been recruited to date. The population is predominately minority: 62% African-American, 33% Hispanic and 5% Caucasian/Asian. The average age of participants is 19.3 years. Recruitment of participants into the study is predominantly (55%) through word of mouth from previously enrolled participants. Few participants learned of the study through their health care providers. The mean blood lead level among study participants is 2.1 ± 1.7 mg/dl, which is consistent with the most recent United States national survey. Conclusions. Blood lead levels are low in young, urban minority women of childbearing age in New York City. In this population, recruitment efforts were substantially enhanced with the help of enrolled participants and the health care community.

Keywords
lead; women; urban population; environmental exposure; minority groups; United States.