CINCINNATI, April 26 (UPI) -- A U.S. study suggests a drug used to remove dangerously high levels of lead from the body might also improve muscle function in lead-exposed children.

University of Cincinnati researchers led by Amit Bhattacharya found children treated with succimer chelation therapy showed a 19 percent improvement in their ability to perform moving tasks such as crossing an obstacle or walking, than did those not receiving treatment.

Chelation is a technique in which a drug is administered to seek and bind poisonous heavy metals, such as lead or mercury, in the bloodstream. The compound resulting from that binding is then excreted in the urine, essentially removing the dangerous metals.

Succimer (Chermet) is an oral chelating drug used to treat children with extremely elevated blood lead levels.

The University of Cincinnati team found succimer chelation therapy improved static balance by 6 percent.

Bhattacharya, a professor of environmental health, said the research is believed the first to report succimer chelation therapy can produce such beneficial results in lead-exposed children.

The team details its findings in the May edition of the journal Neurotoxicology.