

National Paint, Varnish and Lacquer Association

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May 12, 1970

To Members of the NPVLA
Lead Paint Safety Committee:

Enclosed is a copy of an article entitled, "Lead Poison Worst
Ever at 260 Cases", which appeared in today's New York Times.

In Mr. Brown's absence, I am forwarding copies of this article
for your information.

Sincerely,

Ferne M. Horner

Ferne M. Horner, Secretary to
Royal A. Brown, Technical Director

Enclosure

S-W 001817

PROGRESS THROUGH COOPERATION

N 4186

Lead Poison Worst Ever at 260 Cases

By LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN

Physicians have reported 260 cases of lead poisoning in children to the New York City Health Department during the first four months of this year — more than for any other comparable period.

Health officials attribute the rise in reports to recent increased interest on the part of medical and community leaders in this old medical-social problem. This interest led to a release of city funds allowing the Health Department to test more blood specimens for lead, thereby detecting earlier this preventable disease of the home environment.

Health officials suspect that the higher total represents just a small fraction of the lead-poisoning cases here.

"Our calculations indicate that there are about 8,000 cases here," said Dr. Vincent F. Guinee, head of the city's lead-prevention program. In an interview, Dr. Guinee elaborated as follows on some of the statistics on cases of lead poisoning in recent years:

Ninety-three per cent of the lead poisonings occurred among children 1 to 4 years of age.

Although 86 per cent of the cases were among children from black and Spanish-speaking families, youngsters from these groups made up less than half the city's population for that age range.

The 727 cases in 1969 were the highest recorded in the city's history, but the two deaths were the fewest in the last decade. The most deaths from lead poisoning were the 19 in 1960.

None of the 1970 cases reported thus far were fatal.

High rates among young children reflect the fact that they eat the lead paint peeling off the indoor walls of homes built before World War II. Though covered with newer layers, the original lead paint remains on walls in many older homes in poverty areas of New York and other American cities.

Since World War II, laws here and elsewhere in the country have prohibited the use of lead paint indoors. Some outdoor paints still contain lead.

Even the Well-Fed Do It

Studies have shown that half of even well-fed children eat things like paint, clay, plaster, dirt, matches, cigarette butts or crayons that are not food. Doctors call this little-understood phenomenon pica. In zoology, the pica is the genus containing the magpies, which are omnivorous.

Though pica usually begins about age 1 and disappears by age 5, the American Academy of Pediatrics says that "as many as 50 per cent of mothers of children with pica also have pica themselves."

Because the intestine can absorb only small amounts of lead at any one time, ingestion of tiny amounts of lead over a long time can be more dangerous than eating a larger amount once. Doctors suspect a child must eat lead chips for about three months before symptoms of plumbism — from the Latin for lead poisoning — develop.

Once absorbed, lead can affect almost every system of the body. Most of the heavy metal is stored in bones, and appears as opaque white lines at the end of the wrist and knee bones on X-rays of children with severe lead poisoning.

Because lead interferes with

symptoms may appear insidiously or suddenly. The child, whose gums may become blue, may lose his appetite for food, vomit, become less alert and more irritable, have temper tantrums, or develop a clumsy, staggered walk. The child may complain of vague abdominal pains, which can become so severe that he doubles up from spasm of the bowel. This symptom, called "lead colic," has fooled doctors into unnecessary surgery such as appendectomies.

Lead can cause tiny hemorrhages in the brain leading to convulsions and coma. The metal may also interfere with functioning of nerves in the

arm and leg, causing a paralysis called wrist or foot drop.

Doctors want to detect lead poisoning as early as possible to prevent, rather than treat, these symptoms. That is why the Health Department got an infusion of \$1.2-million earlier this year to step up its lead-prevention program.

Action begins when the Health Department receives a report of a case of lead poisoning, either from a practicing physician or from a blood test performed at the department's laboratories.

The most reliable method, Dr. Guinee said, is a laboratory test performed by a process called atomic-absorption spectrophotometry. The Health Department considers abnormal a blood lead level of 60 micrograms or higher. (A microgram is one-thousandth of a gram.)

Some doctors had hoped that the ALA (for delta amino levulinic acid) would be the easiest

screening test for lead-poisoning cases.

The ALA urine test, Dr. Guinee said, is unreliable. A Health Department study, supported by results of similar ones done in Chicago and Baltimore, found that the urine test falsely diagnosed lead poisoning in about 30 per cent of children without the disease and failed to detect about one-third of true lead-poisoning cases.

After receiving a report of a positive lead test, a Health Department representative takes samples of wall paint where the youngster lives.

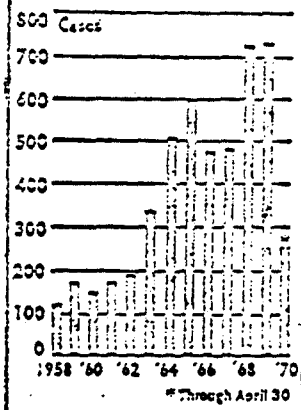
If any of these samples is positive for lead, the Health Department orders the landlord to begin removing the lead source within five days. If the landlord fails to comply, as has happened about half the time, the city's Emergency Repair Program does the work and bills the landlord.

Dr. Guinee said the Health

Department was detecting lead in about one-half of the homes of children suffering from lead poisoning. In the other half, Dr. Guinee said, sampling procedures may have missed the hidden lead paint, or the family may have failed to reveal other homes that the child visited. Mothers who work while on welfare are reticent to reveal this information despite the Health Department's guarantees of confidentiality.

Next month, the Health Department plans to begin using a portable model of a new lead-detecting machine that New York University's department of environmental medicine developed with funds from the city's Health Research Council. It is hoped that this device will enable an inspector to survey an entire housing unit without removing any paint chips and to increase the accuracy of detecting lead paint in homes.

Reported Cases of Lead Poisoning, New York City



the body's manufacture of hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying protein in red blood cells, large amounts of lead cause anemia, a deficiency of such cells. When doctors look through a microscope at stained specimens of blood and see blue specks on the red cells they may suspect lead poisoning.

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