

Lead Found In Teeth of Slum Children

By GARY BROOTEN
Of The Bulletin Staff

The "baby" teeth of children of Philadelphia and suburbs have yielded striking new evidence for the existence of an epidemic of lead poisoning.

The evidence, though preliminary in nature, supports the contention of some doctors that subtle lead poisoning is widespread among toddlers in America's decaying inner cities. It reinforces the high priority some inner city groups place on the removal of leaded paint from homes. And it may point to a research breakthrough on the nature of the lead poisoning problem.

The prevalence of undetected lead poisoning is suspected as one factor contributing to the poor school performance of inner city children, since lead is known to affect the brain.

3 Times More Lead

Baby, or deciduous, teeth are the ones that fall out between the ages of about 3 and 12. A research team has taken some of these teeth, analyzed them chemically, and found that:

--Baby teeth from decaying areas of West and North Philadelphia contain an average of five times more lead than baby teeth from the Media, Elkins Park and Bunting County, N.J., areas.

--While some suburban children have no measurable lead in their baby teeth, this doesn't seem to happen in the inner city. And an inner-city tooth was found loaded with 70 times more lead than the suburban average.

Harvard Professor

The findings were reported at a recent psychiatric meeting in Mexico City by Dr. Herbert L. Needleman, assistant professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Needleman got the idea for the study while on the faculty of the Temple University Health Sciences Center and the staff of Temple's Community Mental Health Center, which he left four months ago. The work was done in collaboration with Dr. Irving Shapiro, a University of Pennsylvania biochemist who specializes in tooth and mouth studies.

Though the sample of baby teeth was statistically small -- a total of 103 -- the distribution of results was so striking that it left little doubt about the relatively high exposure of inner city children to lead poisoning hazards. Dr. Needleman said in a telephone interview.

Housing Unit Sued in Use of Lead Paint

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nervous system necessitating treatment at Episcopal Hospital.

The second suit, filed on behalf of Mrs. Shuford and the coalition, seeks an injunction requiring the Housing Authority to inspect all properties under its control for lead-based paint and to remove the paint wherever it is found.

The suit says the defendants know or should have known of the presence of lead-based paint on authority property as a result of city Health Department reports showing one out of every three children tested in recent years has had an abnormally high level of lead in his body.

The suits were filed by John Padova of the law firm of Solo, Bergman, Trommer, Padova and Albert, 225 S. 15th st.

Two suits against the Philadelphia Housing Authority alleging negligence against the danger of lead poisoning to children were filed today in Common Pleas Court.

The suits were filed by the mother of a child who allegedly suffered physical and nervous system damage from lead poisoning and by the Citywide Coalition Against Lead Paint Poisoning, an organization of more than 50 community and professional groups.

One suit, filed on behalf of Mrs. Pearlina Shuford, 1943 N. 11th st., and her daughter, Samantha, 5, seeks \$100,000 in punitive and other damages. The suit charges the Housing Authority with negligence in exposing the girl to lead paint in violation of the city Health Code at the N. 11th st. address, a building owned by the authority.

The suit alleges that the negligence led to brain damage and injury to the child's

More on lead paint

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Teeth of children in ghetto housing in Philadelphia have been found to contain five times as much lead, on the average, as the teeth of children in neighboring suburban areas.

This new, confirming evidence of the susceptibility of ghetto children to lead poisoning is reported by researchers at the Harvard Medical School and the University of Pennsylvania.

Possibly some of the higher lead intake came from increased air pollution in the city. But there is little doubt that old paint flaking from the walls and woodwork of older housing is a serious health hazard to young children.

The evidence against lead paint could prompt a number of reactions. More concern for possible damage to the mental and emotional makeup of ghetto children from lead poisoning needs to be shown by both the federal and city governments.

In the face of a lead poisoning epidemic among disadvantaged children, Congress last year voted \$7 million for a lead paint eradication program nationwide. Philadelphia has been taking landlords and homeowners who fail to comply with the city's lead paint ordinance to court. But it has relied on reports of suspected lead poisoning rather than on direct housing inspections. The Philadelphia Housing Authority, too, has been slow in removing lead paint from its older rental units.

Community groups and individuals can do much to eliminate lead paint themselves. Work parties can be organized to scrape and repaint lead-painted rooms. The Citywide Coalition Against Childhood Lead Poisoning can warn of the paint peril even more forcefully than it has done in the past.

Lead poisoning among children can be no more tolerated than other preventable diseases.