

SEP 23 1970

Baltimore City Health Department
WEEKLY LETTER TO THE MAYOR WK.37

In his WEEKLY LETTER TO THE MAYOR dated September 18, 1970, the Commissioner of Health wrote:

Dear Mayor:

Baltimore's child lead paint poisoning experience to date in 1970 shows 19 child cases of poisoning compared to 15 at the same time last year. The slight increase over last year is due to a more intensive case-finding program conducted at the Johns Hopkins Hospital by Dr. J. Julian Chisolm, Jr., Associate Professor of Pediatrics and one of the country's leading authorities on child lead paint poisoning.

Hopefully, the end of summer will mark a sharp drop in cases since the pattern of lead poisoning is to peak during hot weather. However, there is no reason for parents or physicians to let down their guard in suspecting lead paint poisoning in any child with vague symptoms of digestive upset or nervous or mental involvement. Lead paint poisoning can occur at any time of the year although most cases occur in summer.

Of the 19 cases reported 12 were children under three years old, 4 were from three to four, and 3 ranged in age from four to twelve years. A case in a five-year-old terminated fatally August 29 thus ending a period of more than 3 years without a death from lead paint poisoning.

Parents and physicians are warned to be constantly alert to a child's exposure to lead paint. Any of the following signs or symptoms should call for an immediate visit to a doctor or clinic to check on child lead poisoning: Nibbling painted surfaces inside or outside the house (quantity is not important--even a small amount can be dangerous), nausea, vomiting, frequent headache, indigestion or constipation, apathy or disinterest, and most serious--convulsions. Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent a family's lifelong hardship in caring for a disabled or mentally defective child. Always suspect lead paint poisoning if a child exhibits any vague symptoms difficult to explain or diagnose.

The City Health Department's 17 member Lead Paint Poisoning Prevention Committee established in 1956 was, so far as is known, the first such committee in the country. Its attack on this problem from legal, environmental, diagnostic and educational standpoints may be seen by a downward trend from 133 cases and 10 deaths in 1958 to less than 20 cases within each of the past three years. Chairman is Dr. Emanuel Kaplan, Assistant Director, Baltimore City Branch, Bureau of Laboratories, Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) Robert E. Farber, M.D.

Commissioner of Health

W

N39092