

'Silent epidemic' continues to take its toll of children

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tally retarded child may cost state and local agencies as much as \$20,000 during the course of his lifetime. Dr. Sussman and members of the City Health Department, as well as the state, are working on a two-pronged approach to lead poisoning last year. The idea was to inspect the homes of children and make blood testing of children living in the "lead belt" around Philadelphia between Washington and Lehigh rivers. But although there had been some indication that federal funds might be made available, the Health Department blew cool on the project. "The city indicated it wasn't going to emphasize comprehensive care," Dr. Sussman says. "And I felt without cooperation and leadership from them, we were in trouble."

WHO PRESUME

There the matter rested till the welfare rights organization began to put the beat on the city. "Right now, anyone can have their house evaluated on demand," says a Health Department spokesman. Formerly, no action was taken until a child was found to have .05 milligrams of lead per 100 milliliters of blood. But other efforts to cope with the problem, down in the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce is sitting on three bills introduced by Rep. William F. Ryan (D-N.Y.). Two of them would provide money specifically for the kind of program the experts think would eliminate the child lead poisoning problem. When it is working on getting bipartisan support for them from Rep. William Green and Sen. Hugh Smith. But it looks as if Ben Franklin may have had the last word on lead poisoning when he observed "how long and full truth may be known and exist, before it is generally received and practiced on."

(The editorial page staff.)

Many Children Get Lead Poisoning Kensington Tenants Union Is Told

By JACK SMYTH
Of The Bulletin Staff

A group of Kensington tenants were warned last night that as many as 2,000 children living in old, dilapidated housing in Philadelphia may be suffering from lead poisoning.

The city only reports 175 cases of lead poisoning in children a year, but probably over 2,000 children have it, Miss Verley Connolly told 40 persons at a meeting of East Front Street Tenants Union.

Miss Connolly is a social work student attached to Community Legal Services.

"Twenty-five percent of the children who get it die," she said. "About 22 percent become mentally retarded and 33 percent have suffered organic brain damage."

Can't Be Removed

She added that the affliction is difficult to diagnose and its ef-

fects can't be removed.

She said it has been estimated that from five to ten percent of children in the one to six age group have lead poisoning.

She explained that it results from children chewing flaking, peeling paint in homes built prior to 1930.

Lead, which was commonly used in paint prior to that time, has since been eliminated by paint manufacturers, Miss Connolly said.

City Evades Problem

City officials have not taken the responsibility of "finding out how extensive the problem is in the city," she charged.

Miss Connolly told her listeners that it is a problem they all face.

"The so-called Lead Belt in Philadelphia—that is the area where the most old, rundown houses are—is between Lehigh and Washington avs., from river

to river," she said.

When a case of poisoning is detected, tenants can have the city inspect the premises, and a law requires landlords to remove the lead-bearing paint,

Miss Connolly said. "But nothing is being done in a preventive way," she added.

7 weeks in hospital

Steve was brought to the hospital's emergency ward on a Saturday afternoon last July. He had been sleeping more than usual. When he began vomiting, his family took him to see several doctors. None of them helped him. "It was a terrible thing," says Dr. Patricia Evers. "By the time he got to the hospital, he was in a coma."

Brain damage

Half of the severe lead poisoning cases are left with permanent brain damage, either mental retardation or convulsions. By the time the poisoning reaches the stage of encephalopathy (diffuse swelling of the cerebral tissues), the mortality rate is 25 percent. There were 12 deaths in Philadelphia between 1961 and 1967, Dr. Sussman, head of St. Christopher's out-patient department, says. "That's not a very good record," he says.

When he was a boy, Ben-

Franklin said, "I caused this 'colica pictonum' heads used in the distilleries friend in 1766, London still in his." Franklin wrote a book about the use of their giving them the dry bellyache. "It poisoned their people, complained about New England that the North Carolinians remembered. He was in a slow heart rate. He was in a state and local agencies as much as \$20,000 during the course of his lifetime.