Press Release

(EMBARGO: 00.01 Sunday 24th October 2021)

Toxic Lead - Still Here, Still Harming

It is the WHO International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week from 24th to 30th October. Unicef estimate that 186,117 to 281,542 UK children have dangerous concentrations of lead in their blood. This could be costing the country 0.31% of GDP or £6bn per year.

The UK stopped using lead in paint, pipes and petrol decades ago, but the toxic legacy remains. 82% of homes were built before lead paint was banned, an estimated 9 million homes still have lead pipes, lead from petrol and paint is still found in soil; and lead exposure can come from many continuing sources.

President Biden said that lead pipes are "a clear and present danger to our children" and proposed spending $45bn to fix the problem. The US EPA says lead poisoning is the number one environmental health threat to children ages six and younger. The UK's use of lead has been similar to the USA.

Lead toxicity can cause a wide range of health problems including:

- Reproductive – miscarriage, pre-term birth, low birth weight, delayed puberty
- Neurological - IQ loss, decreased hearing
- Psychological - problem behaviours, ADHD, depression, anxiety, panic
- Cardiovascular – heart attack, stroke, increased blood pressure
- Renal – reduced kidney function

The LEAPP Alliance is a group of academics, service providers, advocates and parents who are campaigning to achieve improvements in the UK response to continued lead exposure. Our current objectives include achieving:

1. Screening of children for elevated blood lead concentrations (EBLC)
2. Research into the prevalence of EBLCs in children and pregnancy
3. Training and accreditation of employers and workers
4. Policies to cut lead exposure and toxicity including inclusion in the following:
    a. "Giving Every Child The Best Start In Life" programme
    b. Healthy Homes and Buildings White Paper
    c. NHS Long-term Plan
5. Ensuring the UK matches the new, lower EU limits on lead in food
6. Provision of more information on the dangers of lead exposure to the following:
    a. Health care providers, particularly GPs
    b. Housing leaders – tenants and housing associations, professional bodies
    c. Tradesmen and DIYers

There are many low-cost interventions that can help reduce lead exposure, which is a "health problem with a housing solution", that impacts disadvantaged children the most.

Lead Exposure and Poisoning Prevention Alliance (LEAPP)

'ENDS'

Contact information

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Notes for editors

This issue is potentially a huge story for the UK - as it has become in the USA. Some say it is the new asbestos. A great deal has been written about lead poisoning in children and there is extensive research confirming the problem and explaining the solutions. However, UK government agencies' responses remain one of yes, but it is not our job. The UK has never set a lead reduction target until it has been met. Please consider writing, or commissioning, an article to help fix this problem. Perhaps, like the people of Alameda County, California, "Together we can conquer lead poisoning".

Our "Manifesto for a Lead-Safe UK" explains the issue in more detail with full references to scientific papers and government sources.

UK information can be found at:

- LEAPP Alliance
- Lead Containing Materials Association
- Lead In The Water
- Lead Safe World UK

Other useful sources include:

Web Sites

- US National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week 2021
- United States, Centres for Disease Control, Lead
- United States, Environment Protection Agency, Lead
- World Health Organization, Lead Poisoning and Health
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Lead Exposure and Lead Poisoning
- The LEAD Group

Reports

- Unicef, The Toxic Truth
- United States, US National Toxicological Programme, Monograph, Health Effects of Low-Level
- United States, Environment Protection Agency, Integrated Science Assessment
- for Lead
- SW Londoner, 'I was constantly paranoid' the danger of lead paint in UK homes

Videos

- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Lead Toxicity in Children - a continuing problem
- Oneida County Health Department, New York, "Lead Poisoning: The Perfect Predator"
- Alameda County, California, "Together We Can Conquer Lead Poisoning"
- TVNZ, "How much does NZ really know about the risks of lead?"
- Unicef, Why lead poisoning is a danger to your child's health – "Put lead to bed"