



SSA HEALTH NOTES

For November

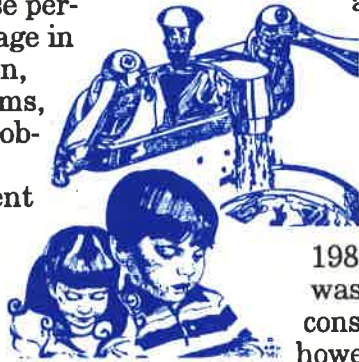
THIS MONTH'S FOCUS FOR YOUR HEALTH -

Lead Poisoning

Can We Learn From The Fall of Rome?

Some historians have suggested that the fall of the Roman Empire was caused by lead poisoning. The Romans drank from lead goblets and stored their water in lead urns. While contemporary Americans do not use lead in these ways, many of our cities have water supplies tainted with unsafe levels of lead. So why should we care, you ask, and what's the big fuss about removing lead from the environment?

A primary concern is that lead when ingested even in small quantities can cause permanent brain damage in children. In addition, neurological problems, anemia, hearing problems and delayed physical development occur. Unborn babies and young children are particularly sensitive. Levels of lead that were once considered safe are now known to also reduce intelligence. Lead poisoning in early childhood has been shown to lower IQ scores by 4 to 5 percent. Serious problems with reading, coordination, and learning may occur when these children are older. These same children are 7 times more likely to drop out of



school and 6 times more likely to have reading disabilities than those exposed to half as much lead. In adults, lead poisoning may increase blood pressure, interfere with hearing, and cause damage to the mental processes, the kidneys and the bone marrow.

Years ago, lead poisoning in children occurred most frequently in low income housing developments where youngsters ingested the lead-based paint that flaked from window sills and walls. Now, most lead problems are attributable to our water supply and affect rich and poor alike. Lead pipe was used in the past to carry water from the street to the house and lead solder was used to join copper pipes together. In 1988, lead based solder was finally banned in new construction. Many homes, however, built before 1988, still have lead based soldered joints, and believe it or not, some cities still have lead pipes carrying water.

Although entirely preventable, childhood lead poisoning is one of the most common pediatric health problems in the United States today. For the most part it is a

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This Flu Season
May Be Worse
Than Usual



A more deadly flu than last year is said to be on our doorstep. According to Dr. L. Schonberger of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "All signs suggest we'll be faced with a serious epidemic causing illness and death this winter if people who need inoculations don't get them."

Flu season is just around the corner again, usually starting in December and running through the winter months. People do die of flu and/or its complications!

Adults in these high risk groups should definitely be immunized: anyone over 65, residents of nursing homes, those with chronic lung problems including children as well as adults having asthma, health care workers, persons with diabetes or with chronic heart, liver or kidney disease. In addition, since influenza can put you out of commission for a week or more, others may also want to have a flu shot.

Don't put it off. Remember that it takes approximately two weeks after having the shot to build up the protective immunity which will last until spring. ■

This is where I got your name/address

Health Notes...continued

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silent evil because the majority of lead poisoned children exhibit no immediate symptoms. In fact, vast numbers of cases go undiagnosed and untreated. It is not solely a problem of the inner city or of minority children as some might have you believe. No socio-economic group, geographic area, or racial or ethnic population is spared this widespread problem. The CDC recommends the screening of all children under the age of 6 years for lead toxicity. Treatment follow up is determined by the level of lead found in the blood.

Recent tests on children reveal that many children have high lead levels. The following list gives the percentage of children with high lead levels in a sampling of cities.

Boston, Mass. -----	69 %
Philadelphia, Pa. -----	62
Trenton, NJ -----	59
Jamaica, NY -----	57.7
Detroit, Mich. -----	56
San Francisco, Ca. -----	55
Lancaster, Pa. -----	52
Miami, Fl. -----	51
Savannah, Ga. -----	51
Binghamton, NY -----	48.1
Portsmouth, Va. -----	47.9
Hartford, Conn. -----	46
New Rochelle, NY -----	45
Elmira, NY -----	29.7

To insure the health of your family, check your water for

lead content. *Consumer Reports* recommends three mail order laboratories that will test it for you.

The Clean Water Fund in Asheville, NC -charge \$12. Tel. 1-704 -251- 0518. Suburban Water Testing Labs in Reading, Pa.-charge \$35. Tel. 1-800-433-6595. National Testing Laboratories, Cleveland, Ohio, charge \$58. Tel. 1-800 458-3330.

Your child may be at risk for lead poisoning if:

- * Home or day care center has old and peeling lead-containing paint.
- * Plays in homes where playmates have lead poisoning.
- * Your home has old metal pipes.
- * Your home is near an industrial source of lead.
- * A member of your family works with lead.

If tests show that your first drawn water has more than 5 parts per billion, but much less on the second draw, you can assume lead is leaching from pipes inside the house. Hereafter, allow water to run for a minute or two before using.

If lead levels are above 5 parts in the second drawn water, it may

mean that the lead is coming from the service line into the house and no amount of flushing will reduce it. If this is the case, that lead levels are high in both specimens of drawn tap water, it isn't necessary to replace all your plumbing and water lines. Instead, buy bottled water for drinking and cooking, or install a home water treatment system. This would be much less expensive than replacing all the plumbing.

Even if lead levels are low, never cook with water drawn from the hot water tap. Hot water can dissolve lead more quickly than cold water. Always use cold water. ■

Effects of Lead Poisoning

In Children

- Interferes with red blood cell production resulting in anemia
- Reduces newborn birth weight
- Causes premature birth
- Delays mental and physical development
- Impairs mental abilities

In Adults

- Increases blood pressure
- Impairs hearing
- Can cause anemia, kidney damage, and brain inflammation

Source: Environmental Protection Agency; Center for Disease Control

Good News !!

Thirty nine years after the introduction of the Polio vaccine, Poliomyelitis, or as we referred to it back then, Infantile Paralysis, has been eradicated from this hemisphere. The American Medical Association reports that there have been no cases in our hemisphere during the past three years. The last reported case was in Peru in 1991.



If aggressive immunization programs continue, the World Health Organization estimates that the disease will be eliminated world wide in another 5-7 years.

Public health immunization programs do work ! ■