

andrea.leadson.mp@parliament.uk

16th November 2016

Address Redacted

The Right Honourable Andrea Leadsom MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House,
17 Smith Square,
London,
SW1P 3JR

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Children and Low Level Lead Poisoning in the UK

I note that you are a founder and patron of PIP UK and take an interest in early year's interventions. The executive summary in a paper entitled '[Educational Interventions for Children Affected by Lead](#)' explains how even low levels of lead are implicated in many of the issues addressed by these initiatives.

I am also writing to you specifically because Defra have published a leaflet regarding [lead paint in older homes](#) and so I assume your departments are responsible for making improvements in this area. If you could pass this email onto appropriate people then I would be very grateful.

You may have been aware of the [WHO Lead Poisoning Week of Action](#) - 23rd to 29th October 2016. Events were held in many developed and developing countries around the world, but there was nothing in the UK. There seems to be little data about blood lead levels in the UK, but the situation could be very similar to the USA where the problem is taken very seriously, including [presidential attention](#).

In 2011, the USA Environment Protection Agency stated "[Lead poisoning: number one environmental health threat to children ages six and younger in the U.S.](#)" The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that there are [535,000 children](#) aged 1 to 5 with blood lead levels high enough to damage their health. On a simple population ratio, that would suggest there could be over 100,000 children in the UK affected to the same degree.

The US [EPA](#) lists the following effects of low levels of lead in children:

- Behaviour and learning problems
- Lower IQ and hyperactivity
- Slowed growth
- Hearing problems
- Anaemia

Pre-natal impacts include:

- Reduced growth of the foetus
- Premature birth

Impacts in adults include:

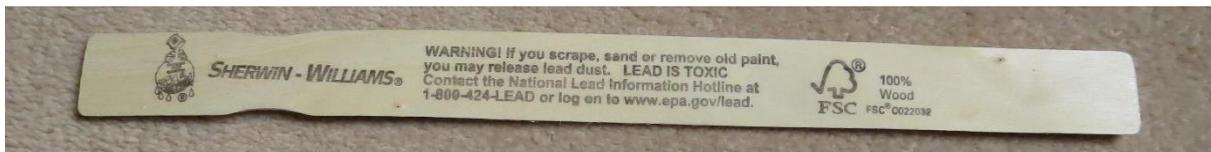
- Cardiovascular effects, increased blood pressure and incidence of hypertension
- Decreased kidney function
- Reproductive problems (in both men and women)

These, and more; including limited evidence for miscarriage, psychological effects and delayed puberty; are researched in considerable detail in the US National Toxicology Programme 2012 [monograph](#) on the health effects of low-level lead. These are all at blood lead levels within the UK normal range.

The total annual cost resulting from lead poisoning in the USA is [estimated to be \\$43.4 billion](#). This would equate to around £7 billion per year in the UK. A [study in France in 2008](#) estimated that lowering blood lead levels in children could have annual benefits of €22.7 billion (£19.6 billion). There would seem to be an economic case for addressing this issue in the UK.

Of course, we do have legislation in the UK regarding lead, e.g. CLAW, COSHH and HHSRS. However, CLAW refers only to work environments. The levels at which action or suspension of workers is required are much higher ([25-60 µg lead/dl of blood](#)) than now considered requiring intervention in children in the USA ([5 µg/dl](#)).

What seems to be needed is better management of lead risks in domestic and public environments in the UK. Although paint and abrasive packaging sometimes warn that special precautions are needed in pre-1960 houses, they do not always specify what those precautions are, or where to find information. I believe there are several low-cost, but high impact, initiatives that could be arranged with manufacturers, retailers and service providers. For example, below is a picture of a paint stirrer from a US hardware store:



If there is anyone in your department who is, or could be, paying attention to the issue of lead poisoning then I would be pleased to provide more information to them. I am also very willing to volunteer to help develop initiatives and policies to manage lead risks in the UK.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that I have no financial interests in any related businesses. I am just a private individual who has been affected by lead, learned a lot about it, and feels driven to help others avoid this 'silent epidemic'.

Lead risks can be managed. We can save misery and money. You can make it happen.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Pye

07768 337619