

27th October 2021

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The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP,
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities,
House of Commons,
London,
SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State,

Levelling Up and Lead Exposure

A recent report published in [JAMA Pediatrics](#) in the USA found ties between lead exposure, older homes, poverty, and race. The UK's use of lead has been similar to the USA and there is no good reason to think that lead exposure and poisoning are not still a health problem in the UK. Our levelling up agenda must include lead exposure and poisoning prevention to avoid life-long and intergenerational disadvantages.

A Unicef report estimates 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](#). Rishi Sunak has said in his 2021 autumn budget speech that it is the "birth right of every child" to succeed. That will not happen if so many lives are blighted by lead poisoning.

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 other 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](#).

Lead toxicity is associated with 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

There are many low-cost [interventions](#) that can help reduce lead exposure which has been described as a ["health problem with a housing solution"](#). Our ["Manifesto for a Lead-Safe UK"](#) explains the issue in much more detail with full references to scientific papers and government sources. Our press release for the WHO [International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week 2021](#) can be found [here](#).

Please will you ensure that the forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper includes initiatives to manage and mitigate lead exposure and poisoning.

Written longhand by me Yours ever, Steve

Steve Norris as a Member of the LEAPP Alliance.



The Lead Exposure and Poisoning Prevention ([LEAPP](#)) Alliance

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