

Happiness Through Health
by Otto McClarrin



LEAD-BASED PAINT POISONING: Due primarily to the very high cost of purchasing new houses, many young married couples are doing the only thing they can afford to do; buying very old houses and rehabilitating them when funds for such renovations become available.

In addition some are attracted to old houses, because many of them have a lot of charm. But a lot of these old houses, especially those that have become dilapidated, are breeding grounds of tragedy for thousands of little children.

It's the paint that's chipping off the walls and woodwork: it's full of lead and it's poison. Little children tend to put almost anything they pick up into their mouths, and paint chips are no exception.

Lucille, a three-year-old from an eastern city, is luckier than many who have lead poisoning. Her mother took her to a health clinic when her appetite failed and she became tired and cranky, complaining of stomach aches. Fortunately, the doctor suspected the trouble and ordered the test which confirmed that her blood had too much lead.

Lucille has recovered after going into the hospital and taking the strong drugs which removed the lead from her blood. The lucky set of

But all that old paint, sometimes layers deep, is leaving a tragic legacy. Estimates based on census statistics tell us that over two million children under six are living in dilapidated housing containing hazardous amounts of lead. Additional surveys show that almost a fourth of them have dangerous amounts of lead in their bloodstream.

Various federal and local governmental agencies and concerned community organizations have been spearheading lead-based paint prevention programs ranging from rehabilitation to research, to seeking out cases, to treatment, to education.

While the biggest effort is in slum areas of the nation's large cities, they know it exists throughout the country wherever there is old, run-down housing. Even in the best-maintained older housing, remodeled farmhouses or city townhouses perhaps danger can exist as in the case of a toddler chewing on a low windowsill or stair railing. When a crib or toy hits the woodwork, off pops a bit of paint for little fingers to pick up.

circumstances for her were, first, that she had any symptoms at all and also that her mother's worry and the doctor's hunch led to the diagnosis. The symptoms can easily be overlooked as a behavior problem or minor ailment - until it is too late.

A little chip of paint the size of your fingernail 100 times the amount of lead a child can safely consume a day. If she'd kept it up, the deadly long-term effects could have led to blindness, mental retardation even death. Recent national statistics show that a child died of lead poisoning every 36 hours.

Some 40 years ago, lead was a major ingredient in every house paint on the market. Lead made paint dry faster and adhere better, gave it a shinier and harder finish. The better and more expensive the paint, the more lead it contained - up to 50 percent in many cases.

In the 1940s medical scientists began to speak out against the presence of so much lead in the everyday living environment of people. First the paint manufacturers began reducing the percentage of lead, especially in interior paint; more recently federal legislation has limited lead to an infinitesimal amount. So homes built in recent years are paint-safe.

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