[MS-0087.010.004.005]

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April 13, 1972

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Studies indicate a high probability of lead poisoning conditions existing unknown to its victims until almost too late. A program needs to be launched to screen possible victims who can benifit from treatment.

Chester Holliday, director of Project STAR in San Diego stated: "We believe it (lead poisoning) is here because of certain existing conditions in San Diego." These conditions are low income, delapidated housing built before 1950 when lead paint was used, broken homes, overcrowded living conditions, and poor nutrition. Such conditions are similar to large eastern urban areas where young children have been found to be suffering from lead-poisoning.

Leading paint is an inexpensive method to bring out glossiness. Before 1965 there were no regulations controlling the amount of lead in paint; therefore, older houses have been built using highly leaded paint. Occupants of older homes are generally the victims of lead poisoning.

The problem lies with young children of age 9 months to about 6 years who are in the exploratory age where everything is popped into the mouth. At these ages children often crave non-food items. Peeling paint off the walls of older buildings fits both of these attractions. The lead in paint apparently tastes sweet. Thus, a young child not getting proper nutrition eats painted plaster or particles of peeling paint.

When the amount of lead in the blood stream reaches a certain point, serious problems can result. The ratio of lead in the blood-stream causing lead poisoning differs by the size and weight of a person. A child eating paint containing lead over a period of three months can go

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into convulsions. With these convulsions permanent brain damage and retardation or death can result.

There is a type of therapy known as "chelation" which removes lead from the blood stream; however, there are no certain symptoms to indicate the possibility of lead poisoning existing without having a blood test or urinalysis. So, generally, the chelation therapy can not be given until a child has reached a critical point and the permanent damage has been done.

Project STAR has been deeply concerned and involved in this problem. As Chester Holliday pointed out, "Project STAR seeks to maintain an awareness between the physical and social environment and the incidence of mental retardation. (STAR is short for Serving to Advance Rehabilitation.) Because of the similarities existing between San Diego and areas known to have had cases of lead poisoning, there seems to be a need for a widespread program to test for the problem."

Testing can be done by two methods: urinalysis and blood tests. Urinalysis is simpler and can be done at home, but blood tests are more thorough and reliable.

Project STAR proposes a spearhead study of the possibility of lead poisoning existing in San Diego. If 17 cases exist out of 500 families tested, or 3½% with high levels of lead in the blood, then a community-wide program of screening will definitely be warranted. Other actions will have to be taken also.

At present there is no way to tell what the incidence of lead poisoning is in San Diego. No one is legally bound to report cases of lead poisoning. Out of 24 hospitals questioned about the number of lead poisoning cases treated, only 7 replied, each stating that no

cases existed.

If the study-sampling families indicate that there are a great many cases of lead poisoning in the area, Mr. Holliday stated that further action would have to be taken. He said; "We would have to seek city and county ordinances enforcing housing codes and regulations toward the goal of correcting and preventing the use of lead in paint."

The cost of such programs is like an "ounce of prevention" as compared to the cost of caring for a retarded child for life.

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