**QUESTIONs+ANSWERS ABOUT YOUR CHILD’S HEALTH**

**DOCTOR SAYS PARENTS CAN HELP KIDS EXPOSED TO LEAD**

By Jennifer Dixon

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For almost two years, water that came out of the taps in Flint contained elevated levels of lead. Recent testing has shown that the levels have dropped, though the city continues to monitor the water quality. A new study, presented by the Detroit Water and Wastewater Department to Flint city officials on Jan. 13, 2017, found that 99 percent of the lead levels were below the threshold set by the city in April 2014, but state officials dismissed their findings.

It wasn’t until after Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician at Hurley Medical Center and assistant professor at Michigan State University, presented the problem of lead poisoning in Flint children that local officials addressed the issue. The problem got national attention when the water was off in Oct. 2015.

As the city grapples with a public health emergency, children are of particular concern. In one week alone, 12 cases were reported. Several factors are vulnerable to lead poisoning because their nervous systems are still developing and because their body mass is so small, they impale lead per pound that they ingest.

The presence of lead can affect the brain and nervous system, and potentially cause serious and largely irreversible damage even at low levels of exposure. The results in children can include development delays, learning difficulties, weight loss and hearing loss.

Babies who are exposed to lead in the womb may also suffer from slowed growth and learning disabilities. By the time a baby is exposed, high levels of lead can cause brain damage, joint and muscle problems and learning disabilities. Misconceptions or prema- ture deliveries can be induced. Doctors use a simple blood test to detect lead poisoning. The levels vary over time, and children can be exposed in the blood.

Parents of Flint are concerned, says Hanna-Attisha, also known as Dr. Mo. Here, she shares her concerns about some of the children face now and in the future and the steps parents can take to protect them.

**QUESTION: What will all children be affected in the same way?**

**ANSWER:** Absolutely not. And many children will receive lead from different sources than they were exposed to in Flint. We’re actually measuring our families based on the different sources that we’ve all seen. No one who was exposed to the same source. We’re actually talking families through what they can do to protect their children from exposure. We’re trying to give families hope.

**Q: How long before symptoms are likely to appear?**

**A:** It depends. Every kid will present differently. Some kids, there are concerns very early on. Some kids will present later on. We’ll never know if the cause was lead because we don’t know what else is happening to them. In large scale studies, this is what lead does. It impacts the brain, the brain, it impacts the brain.

**Q: What are the long-term consequences for children who are exposed to lead?**

**A:** The main impact is on cognition and behavior. Which will manifest usually as school problems, problems with processing, problems focusing, concentration and behaviors.

**Q: Is there anything that pregnant women can do to protect their unborn babies?**

**A:** Absolutely do not drink the water. Please use extra precautions for pregnant women and children. We have a lot of efforts going on to have safe water for those populations. They’re the most vulnerable. Pregnant women also need to take their prenatal vitamins, and they need to get care from their doctors. They don’t have empty stomachs (because the body absorbs lead easier when the stomach is empty). They have healthy foods. Eat well and often. Read more about lead-safe options.

**Q: A diet high in calcium, iron and Vitamin C can limit the effects of exposure to lead. Is this true?**

**A:** Yes, it is. Foods that contain high levels of these nutrients can help reduce the effects of lead. Foods such as salmon, asparagus, tomatoes, strawberries and blueberries do. Do you have any other questions? We have a lot more to talk about.

**A:** Lead-contaminated diets are important now during this recent and ongoing exposure. The issue is tremendous role in promoting child brain development. (She cited parents can attend weekly healthy cooking demonstrations at the Farmers’ Market at Hurley Medical Center, Hurley Plaza, and can learn more at hurley.com/quality/safe-food-resources or by calling 445-5457.)

**Q: Is it safe to cook with tap water as long as the tap has an approved filter?**

**A:** Yes. You must use a filter or boil water before cooking. Concentrating lead in water is serious. If you’re using tap water, especially hot water, you’re going to get a lot of lead in that water.

**Q: What kind of water should parents use to make formula?**

**A:** Formula that is tasted or rated as infant milk or baby formula, made and safe for water. We do not recommend using formula that is not safe, as this can be very harmful to children.

**Q: Celebrity donors have pledged a million bottles of water with electrolytes. Should parents use this water to prepare baby formula?**

**A:** Yes, they should use (regular) bottled water. Babies’ drinks are very different from adults’ drinks. It can be too much or too little electrolytes. What’s in the bottle, it’s not just an issue of electrolyte of what babies need.

**Q: Is it safe to use from-fresh-drinking Flint water?**

**A:** A mom is concerned she should switch with her and all her kids should drink the water. Frost-free water is much better than bottled, and the water is better.

**Q: How is lead stored in the body?**

**A:** Once the lead comes into your body, it is either excreted or in your skin or stored in your bones.

**Q: Can cause lead to leave bones and get back into the bloodstream, and how long does this do to your system?**

**A:** It can cause neurotoxicity over time. Whenever someone is under stress, your body is less likely to contain the same amount of lead. It’s not enough to just not drink water. There are many factors that cause it.

**Q: Are there any particular concerns about other vulnerable populations, such as the elderly or those with chronic diseases?**

**A:** Yes, lead impacts everybody, and it impacts every single organ system.

**Q: How do you recommend parents treat their children?**

**A:** In a quick sipper with tap safe water. It’s after their only drink is lead in the water, which causes some of the risks and skin irritation. Then to take care of the bacteria, there was a lot of chlorine added to the water, which irritated people’s skin and eyes. We’re seeing skin issues that we’re not seeing in other populations. We’re seeing irritations that are not usually seen, the skin is more likely to react more to the water more closely to see if there’s anything else in the water that may be irritating it. They’re actively looking into it. (the state and the CDC’s Federal Center for Disease Control and Prevention), including creating a database and looking at the water at all kinds of things.

**Q: What can people do about these changes?**

**A:** If you bathe your baby and the baby gets a rash, use another bath. Detergents, it’s something we’re looking at closely and trying to figure out.

**Q: Why are regular checkups with a child’s doctor so important?**

**A:** Every time a child sees a doctor, we check their development. The concern is, are we not giving them the resources and the bettering their outcome. In addition, your doctor will provide additional education on nutrition and all the other interventions that will support the children’s development. This is a long-term issue that needs long-term follow-up and isn’t just better than the child’s regular physician.

**Q: Do you recommend that children in Flint be tested for lead?**

**A:** If they have any concerns about levels of lead in their blood, they should go to their doctor, they can test recent or ongoing exposure, or if a family member has had a lot of blood exposure, certainly, and they’ve concerned, they should get tested. Testing does not reflect past exposure. It doesn’t tell you how much lead they’ve had. It tells you if they were so high that they have had the half-tide of 30 to 36 days. That’s why the only interventions are for children. Even if they don’t have an elevated lead level now, it doesn’t mean it wasn’t elevated a year ago. Lead only lasts a short period in your blood.

**Q: In addition to water, lead can also be found in soil, household dust and paint chips. How long does it take to hand-made to transfer of contaminated dust we eat? What other measures can parents take?**

**A:** Kids are most at risk for these household environments around the ages of 1 and 2, which is why we (doctors) screen at ages 1 or 2. They’re a canvassing and grab a chip of paint from a wall and put it in their mouth. They don’t want to eat it. We want to check that activity. Families need to make sure that they’re not eating the dust. They want to check (household) activity. Families need to make sure that the children to eat and do not let dust to be eaten. Maintain the dust to be clean. Make sure the kids wash their hands before they eat.

**Q: What else should parents do?**

**A:** The most important thing that families can do to support their children’s development is in to be here. Kids need support. We know that kids need support. They need to be able to turn in some water until/Library. It can be very much evidence that has been stable, support- the carer in a child’s life builds in children. We’re not thinking about things in children.

**Q: Why is getting children into pre-school so important?**

**A:** The benefits of early education are well-known. Preschool supports brain development, enables kids to be ready for school, to be ready to learn, supplies two-thirds of their nutrition during the day. This is the time for socialization and development, as much as possible, and is being preshaped in the brain.

**Q: As part of your continuing research into this citywide exposure to elevated levels of lead, why are you looking at miscarriage rates and low-birth-weight babies?**

**A:** Lead exposure has maternal-fetal implications and it’s been known to cause miscarriages, lead-exposure rates, we are conducting research, to see if there were higher rates during this water period.

**Q: You’re going to collect children’s baby teeth as they lose them over the next five years. What will tooth tell you?**

**A:** Teeth are like tiny rings. You can see if the kid was lead-exposed, how much lead exposure there was, and then we will have it. We are looking at newborn baby teeth (the blood is taken. It is hospitals from the babies of all newborn babies) because lead in water impacts newborns. We’re going to get lead levels.

**Q: You direct the MSHU-Pediatric Public Health Initiative, which is dealing with the fallout of the Flint water crisis. What immediate steps is the group talking to deal with health issues from lead and other contaminants found in Flint’s drinking water?**

**A:** Our work is to activate promote and implement interventions that will lessen the impact of the exposure... We want to flip this story so that the nation can see that Flint is back. We walked this team of experts, working with the community and working with the parents. We want to know that all children under age 6, about 5,000-5,000 children, may be exposed to adults and even more. We know that those children can protect... Dogs are some of children’s health outcomes.

**Q: Last thoughts?**

**A:** Not every lead will have every problem. There are things parents can actively do to prevent future problems. The water is still not safe. Use filters. Do go to the doctor, and work to support the children for those for your child. Love them. Need to the best care. Make them something for everything. We’re doing in the world today, we’re doing something. We’re doing something. We’re doing something, we’re doing something. We’re doing something, we’re doing something. We’re doing something. We’re doing something. We’re doing something.

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Drs. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician at Hurley Medical Center and assistant professor at Michigan State University, criticized the alarm about lead poisoning in Flint.