

U.S. Rep. Watson Coleman visits Trenton home that sickened child with lead poisoning

By David Foster, The Trentonian

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TRENTON >> When Joy Ingram-Robinson's 2-year-old daughter started showing signs that she was sick, her mother thought it was because she was a premature baby.

"Her fingernails came off and she wasn't in any pain," Ingram-Robinson described Monday outside of the family's Laurel Avenue home. "I just want what's best for my baby because my baby already fought to be here: she was only born 1 pound 5 ounces."

So Ingram-Robinson took little J'Selle to the doctors last week and she tested positive for lead poisoning. The 2-year-old's blood lead levels tested at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reference point of 5 micrograms per deciliter, the mother said.

"They caught it just in time for her to take medication," a relieved Ingram-Robinson said.

U.S. Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-12) and Trenton Mayor Eric Jackson visited the house where the lead-poisoned child lives on Monday.

They were taken on a tour by Prince Moore, the construction manager for Isles.

"You're going to find that every window that I do a test on is going to come up positive for lead," Moore said. "There's lead paint throughout this house, not only on the windows, but also on the floors around the house."

With his lead testing kit, Moore would swab paint on the windows, banisters and door frames of the living room, bedrooms and porch. Each time, a bright lead color would appear, indicating a positive test for lead paint.

"Oh my God," Watson Coleman said after seeing the test results at one of the windows where a large amount of lead-tainted paint chips were in the window sill and on the floor.

Elyse Pivnick, environmental health director of Isles, said the city's biggest lead problem is from old paint.

"Most of Trenton's housing and schools were built before 1978," Pivnick said. "That means there's a good chance that there's old lead paint, there's lead in some of the water pipes, and there's a high likelihood that the lead in the walls and the pipes has become available to children. Unfortunately, there's too many homes in Trenton that are not been able to be maintained at the highest standard."

Children can ingest lead from inhaling dust or touching the paint and putting their hands in their mouths.

The home's owner, Robert Ingram, said he was not privy to that information before learning that J'Selle was sickened from lead poisoning. He said a ~~lot~~ large quantity of children occupy the house on a daily basis.

"I truly care about them because they care about pop-pop," Ingram said, noting the house has been in the family since the 1940s. "I didn't know by just breathing and touching those windows, they can get the lead."

The Ingram family, however, is in luck.

Mayor Jackson announced Monday that the city received a three-year, \$2.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to address lead in older homes in the capital city. Ingram's house on the first block of Laurel Avenue will be one of the first homes to receive lead remediation and abatement under the grant.

"Childhood lead poisoning is considered one of the most preventable environmental diseases particularly among young people," Jackson said. "Yet, we have lead poisoning in our homes and with our young that continues to be a major problem, not only in our city but across our country. Abating these hazards at one home at a time is going to take significant resources and many years to complete, but that will not hinder us."

Lead has become a hot topic in Trenton since it was determined that children in the capital city have lead blood levels almost double to kids in Flint, Mich., the epicenter of toxic water.

Though lead is believed to be mostly a housing issue in Trenton, two weeks ago, city public schools revealed one in five water sources in the district's 22 schools and four administrative buildings were identified to test above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) acceptable lead level of 15 parts per billion (ppb).

Last week, Assemblywoman Liz Muiolo and State Sen. Shirley Turner (both D-Mercer/Hunterdon) highlighted their identical bills that would mandate testing every five years in schools and for the results to be posted publicly for remediation of the lead in drinking water if high levels are found.

To further address the issue, Congresswoman Watson Coleman announced Monday a bill that she introduced that would prohibit elementary schools from allowing children to attend without first being tested for lead. Lead exposure poses serious health risks to children under the age of 6. Learning disabilities, lower IQ scores, behavioral problems, kidney and brain damage, and reduced attention span are all contributed to higher lead levels.

"The earlier we have notification of higher lead content in an individual, the sooner and the better we can remediate the issue and accommodate whatever cognitive issues that are encountered as a result of having been exposed to lead," Watson Coleman said. "It also can inform our school districts that there are students right now in those districts that have been classified but really need to be reclassified and identified as needing educational adaptations associated with cognitive impairment that comes as a result of being exposed to lead."

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