

Secretary Kathleen Sebelius
US Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington DC 20201

May 27, 2010

Re: False statement in the CDC MMWR May 21, 2010 / 59(19); 592

We draw your attention to a false statement in a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR) “Notice to Readers” regarding blood lead in DC children (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5919a4.htm>). The key assertion of this new report, is that in 2004, the CDC concluded that blood lead of DC children was over the 10 ug/dL CDC “level of concern” from lead contaminated water because:

“...the percentage of test results $\geq 10 \mu\text{g/dL}$ and the percentage of test results $\geq 5 \mu\text{g/dL}$ at addresses with lead service pipes were higher than at addresses without lead service pipes.”

In reality, in 2004, the CDC did not conclude (or even imply) that the blood lead of even a single child was $\geq 10 \mu\text{g/dL}$ due to lead-contaminated drinking water. The above sentence, extracted from the 2004 report for insertion into the 2010 report, was from a paragraph in the original report that asserted just the *opposite* – that the higher percentage of blood lead levels $\geq 10 \mu\text{g/dL}$ for children in homes with lead service pipes resulted from exposures to lead paint and dust hazards. The original text is reproduced below (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5312a6.htm>):

“Homes with lead service pipes are older, and persons living in these homes are more likely to be exposed to high-dose lead sources (e.g., paint and dust hazards). For this reason, in all years reported, the percentage of test results $\geq 10 \text{ ug/dL}$ and the percentage of test results $\geq 5 \text{ ug/dL}$ at addresses with lead service pipes were higher than at addresses without lead service pipes.”

The CDC’s 2010 “Notice to Readers” is an attempt to defend the indefensible (the 2004 CDC MMWR), by extracting part of a sentence completely out of its original context and claiming it was the CDC’s “original conclusion” of health harm from lead in drinking water. The fact that no such conclusion exists in the 2004 CDC MMWR, makes this an Orwellian attempt to re-write history. CDC should take responsibility for its historic betrayal of the public trust, and immediately retract both the 2004 and 2010 reports, because they are dangerous falsifications that can further jeopardize the public’s health.

Sincerely,



Marc Edwards
Charles Lunsford Professor of Civil Engineering



MMWR™

Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

Weekly

April 2, 2004 / Vol. 53 / No. 12

Editorial Note: The findings in this report indicate that although lead in tap water contributed to a small increase in BLLs in DC, no children were identified with BLLs $\geq 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, even in homes with the highest water lead levels. In addition, the longitudinal surveillance data indicate a continued decline in the percentage of BLLs $\geq 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$. The findings in this report suggest that levels exceeding the EPA action level of 15 ppb can result in an increase in the percentage of BLLs $\geq 5 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$. Homes with lead service pipes are older, and persons living in these homes are more likely to be exposed to high-dose lead sources (e.g., paint and dust hazards). For this reason, in all years reported, the percentage of test results $\geq 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ and the percentage of test results $\geq 5 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ at addresses with lead service pipes were higher than at addresses without lead service pipes.

Notice to Readers: Examining the Effect of Previously Missing Blood Lead Surveillance Data on Results Reported in *MMWR*

May 21, 2010 / 59(19);592 These results do not change CDC's original conclusions that "the percentage of test results $\geq 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ and the percentage of test results $\geq 5 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ at addresses with lead service pipes were higher than at addresses without lead service pipes."

In the 2004 *MMWR* report, the first sentence of the Editorial Note referred to a cross-sectional study of homes with very high lead levels in drinking water and stated that "no children were identified with blood lead $\geq 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, even in homes with the highest water lead levels." This sentence was misleading because it referred only to data from the cross-sectional study and did not reflect findings of concern from the separate longitudinal study that showed that children living in homes serviced by a lead water pipe were more than twice as likely as other DC children to have had a blood lead level $\geq 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$.

IN SUPPORT

Parent advocates

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Father of twin boys who had elevated lead that was likely caused by lead in our water
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Marilia Duffles

Ward 4 resident, appalled observer of the hideous negligence, active in DC's struggle for safe drinking water since January 2009
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Liz Festa

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Katie Funk

Parent and former DC resident
At the time of the DC lead water crisis, I was a new mother living in a house with "unclassified" pipes. Our lead water levels tested 10-20 higher than the 15 ppb EPA threshold. My newborn tested at a blood lead level in excess of 15. Subsequently, the city replaced the service line (which was lead) and our internal house service line (which was lead). Within 2 years, our daughter's blood lead levels dropped to less than 2 ppb. Now, at age 6, her blood lead levels are not measurable. I worked with members of our Capitol Hill neighborhood to hold WASA, the DC Government and the Federal Government accountable for this public health fiasco. In May 2004, I testified before the House Government Oversight Committee on this issue.
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Satu Haase-Webb

Parent in Ward 6, with house that had high lead levels in water in 2004 (over 300 ppb), who then became actively involved in learning more about the issue and informed others about it (via community meetings, Council hearings, DC WASA meetings etc.), and finding the truth about the effects of the DC lead-in-water-crisis.
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Kat Song

Ward 1 parent, involved in the struggle for safe drinking water and reliable scientific information since 2004

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Thomas Walker

Parent in Ward 4

I knew that lead-contaminated water alone can poison children in 2002-2003, when my daughter's pediatrician told me that specially hired risk assessors had linked the elevated blood lead of one of his young patients to contaminated water at the child's home. When the 2004 CDC report came out, claiming that not a single DC child had been poisoned from the water, I knew it was false.

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Mary C. Williams

Former ANC 6D03 Commissioner and representative for the Southwest Carrollsbury Place neighborhood in Ward 6

We were part of the original test group in 2003, a neighborhood where homes tested as high as 500 ppb.

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