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NY Governor Announces Lead Poisoning Task Force

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New York Governor David A. Paterson just announced the creation of the Governor's Task Force on the Prevention of Childhood Lead Poisoning, which is being developed in an effort to add to New York's work to eradicate childhood **lead poisoning**, reports the Gouverneur Times. The Task Force will convene State agencies, which will work on coming up with suggestions for the creation and installation of "a coordinated strategy to reduce childhood exposure to lead, said the Gouverneur Times.

Lead exposure can cause brain and nervous system damage, behavioral and learning problems, slowed growth, hearing problems, headaches, mental and physical retardation, and behavioral and other health problems in children and unborn children. Even at very low levels, lead is harmful to children's health and at elevated blood lead levels children experience neurological problems, anemia, lower IQ scores, and shortened attention spans. At elevated levels, children can suffer from comas, seizures, and death.

In addition to the Task Force, said the Gouverneur Times, the governor announced—to name a couple—increased funding for the Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention Program (CLPPPP) and that his administration has taken additional actions to address lead poisoning, including proposed legislation for a statewide immunization registry to retain information on children with elevated blood lead levels, and improving the Department of Health's (DOH) ability to look at screening rates.

"As I said in October, when New York's fiscal crisis forced me to veto a worthy bill that I had sponsored years ago, lead poisoning is a scourge that has plagued and destroyed the lives of too many children, the vast majority of whom live lives deprived in too many ways. I am committed to eradicating lead poisoning in New York State, and with the creation of this task force, our public health efforts will now focus on prevention," said Governor Paterson, in part, quoted the Gouverneur Times.

Childhood lead poisoning, said the Gouverneur Times, is generally a result of lead-based paint as well as the paint dust from lead-based paint that can be found in houses, for example, built prior to 1978. The Gouverneur Times pointed out that lead poisoning, in addition to its serious and irreparable effects on pediatric "growth and development," also seems to have a significant effect on lower income and minority youth.

The Task Force will also look at how State resources can be best used for "State and local primary prevention activities" meant to minimize lead exposure in children, said the Gouverneur Times. The Task Force will also look at having county and local governments collaborate on these efforts and will specifically look into issues around housing and lead contamination, such as ensuring public housing is lead-free prior to inhabitation by children under specific ages, said the Gouverneur Times. The Task Force will also be charged with ensuring public funding is used for housing renovations such as lead paint "hazard remediation," and looking into funding sources, such as government grants, added the Gouverneur Times.

The Task Force will issue a preliminary report by November 30, 2009. A final report will be issued on or before November 30, 2010.

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