Lead Poisoning On The Rise In Kent County

The Grand Rapids Times

The Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan has announced new health data that shows after a decade of decline, the number of lead-poisoned children in Kent County is rising.

The 49057 zip code in Grand Rapids not only continues to lead the state of Michigan in numbers of most lead-poisoned children but this same zip code has seen a 50 percent increase in children being poisoned during the past two years.

The culprit is tin in the water. The amount of lead in Grand Rapids water is far below federal thresholds and is among the safest in the state. The culprit is lead-based paint found in older homes.

When Grand Rapids resident Lynne Adams' young daughter tested positive for lead a decade ago, she later learned the poisoning likely occurred from lead-based paint baking from windows in the home she was renting. She immediately got appropriate medical care for her daughter before the child was permanently harmed — and Adams also went directly to her landlord and worked with him to get the lead hazard out of the home.

Today, her daughter is a thriving 12-year-old at City Middle School in Grand Rapids. And Adams has already had her 5-year-old son tested for lead — no detectable lead was found.

Not all parents and children in Kent County — and particularly in key Grand Rapids neighborhoods — have been as fortunate.

According to data provided by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Lead Poisoning, 2

Trump Tax Plan Would Deal Long-Term Blow to Working- and Middle-Class Americans

News Analysis

By Lindsay Koshgarian, Truthout

Part I of II

Continued from last week

Headlines, Corporate Edition

The biggest single tax giveaway in the Trump proposal is a cut in the corporate tax rate.

Corporate tax rate discussions are often hijacked by misleading claims about how high or low the corporate tax rate in the United States is now, and what the consequences for US competition are. However, the most relevant facts are these:

The current corporate tax rate is 35 percent; almost no corporation actually pays that much; thanks to a complex system of loopholes and deductions, and many profitable corporations actually manage to pay nothing at all in federal income taxes.

In a study of 256 profitable Fortune 500 corporations, the average effective tax rate — what the corporations actually paid to the federal government — was about 21.2 percent from 2008 to 2016.

A majority of Americans, including one-third of Republicans and two-thirds of Democrats, think large business and corporations should pay higher, not lower, taxes. The Trump answer to that is familiar to anyone who lived through the presidency of Ronald Reagan. The large corporation at the top is supposed to "trickle down" to the masses. What actually happens when corporate tax rates are slashed is that corporations mostly do just what they would have done anyway, in terms of worker pay and job creation, and CEOs and stockholders take home the difference. A recent study found that instead of being potent job creators, profitable corporations that paid the lowest taxes actually cut jobs, on average.

But even if it won't create new jobs, will the corporate tax cut somehow result in higher wages — as much as $9,000 higher for some workers, as the Trump Tax Plan, pg 5

M4BL Electoral Justice Project Kicks Off Series Of Local Town Halls Across The Country

Organizations in dozens of cities including St. Louis, Greensboro, Miami, New York, and Atlanta hosted town halls Nov. 5–7, as part of new project aimed at building Black political power in communities across the country

Washington D.C. — The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) recently created the Electoral Justice Project.

The nonpartisan project is designed to build power in communities of color by supporting grassroots organizations building electoral strategies ahead of upcoming elections.

The project also provides research, resources and support to those seeking to use political engagement to change conditions in their communities.

The first phase of the project is a series of local town halls kicking off this past Sunday with more slated throughout the month of November. The EJP town halls are opportunities for Black organizations and the communities they serve to convene community members, and to educate and activate them to build power before the 2018 midterm elections," said Kayla Reed, an organizer with the St. Louis Action Council, and a leader of the M4BL Electoral Justice Table that created the project.

"Our elected officials in Washington and others across the country continue to pass policies that are disparately impacting Black communities," Reed said.

"Black people have been a consistent voting bloc in this country and our needs continued to be ignored. We created the Electoral Justice Project to empower our voices and mobilize our voters around issues that deeply impact us.

"Every single day Black people are living and working in communities where public policy doesn't match our needs. We believe that Black people deserve policies that will improve our material conditions across the country and beyond. This election season, we aim to M4BL, pg 14
Lead Poisoning On The Rise In Kent County

Last fall, Grand Rapids was awarded $2.9 million in HUD funding to fix homes with lead-based paint hazards. Typical "fixes" include new windows and exterior painting or siding. The HUD funding is available to eligible homeowners, landlords and tenants.

Anyone who owns or rents a home in the city of Grand Rapids built before 1978 is encouraged to learn about funding eligibility. For more information, please call the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan at 616-241-3300 or visit www.GetTheLeadOutGR.org. Or, contact the city of Grand Rapids Community Development Department at 616-456-3030.

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Continued from pg 1 (MDHHS, 615 Kent County children have elevated blood-lead levels in 2016 – the year for which most recent data is available. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has established that 5 micrograms per liter is the reference level at which the CDC recommends public health actions be initiated.

Lead poisoning is also zirring in zip codes 49504 and 49503. Two out of every three lead poisoned children in Kent County live in zip codes 49507, 49504 or 49503. These are high-poverty, high-minority neighborhoods in Grand Rapids.

African-American children were lead poisoned at twice the rate of white children in Grand Rapids in 2015, according to MDHHS data.

Lead poisoning is causing serious health problems, including permanent brain damage.

"Many people are unaware that lead exposure from dust in the house and soil in the yard is the culprit," said Paul Haan, executive director of the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan and gubernatorial appointee to the state of Michigan's Child Lead Exposure Elimination Commission.

Lead licks in the interior and exterior paint of homes built before 1978 – the year lead-based paint was banned – and most houses in the city of Grand Rapids were built before that year.

Paint flakes and peels, and when improperly scraped or sanded off, dangerous lead dust can be kicked up. That flaking, peeling lead paint and dust – ingested or breathed in – can be dangerous to anyone.

But lead is especially toxic to babies, children and pregnant women.

It doesn't take much lead to create a toxic situation.

"We're talking about a small amount as small as the equivalent of a packet of Swee'T N Low – just that small amount is enough to contaminate the floors of a dozen homes in Grand Rapids," said Haan.

Why lead poisoning is on the rise in Kent County, and particularly in Grand Rapids – and what can be done about it – was the subject of discussion and debate at the Oct. 30 event held at Dickinson Academy on Grand Rapids' southeast side.

Held on the heels of the national Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, the event brought together about 40 parents and Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan representatives plus Kent County Com-

missioner Robert S. Womack. Representatives from Home Repair Service, the Kent County Health Department and Legal Aid also attended.

The alarming lead-based paint poisoning statistics frustrate and anger Adams. Now she's speaking out. She is part of the recently formed Parents for Healthy Homes group, which met with other concerned parents on Oct. 30 at Dickinson Academy to address the lead problem in the community.

"These are our kids, and they're being poisoned – our future is being poisoned," Adams said. "We need to let more people know about lead poisoning and how to stop it from happening in the first place. Prevention is key."

Ultimately, the parents in attendance advocated strongly for educational opportunities in their communities, a stronger presence in the media, and required testing of homes and children for lead.

Haan said the group of parents will continue to work on awareness – building and actionable steps, continuing to reach out to a wider array of parents and community leaders.

"Many property owners and property dwellers may have no idea that dangerous lead exists in their home," Haan said. "Even well-intentioned remodelers might not be dealing properly with lead and actually making the problem worse."

Currently, houses in Kent County aren't required to be tested for lead. A property owner can sell, rent or remodel a home without checking it for lead or lead hazards. The city of Grand Rapids last updated its housing codes in regards to lead in 2005.

Haan said, "It's an environmental justice issue that the 49507 zip code in Grand Rapids has more lead poisoned children than any other zip code in all of Michigan. We can't accept that it's okay for these children to be lead poisoned. We need to do better. We need bold, new strategies and higher standards to protect all kids.

Grand Rapids Children Tested for Lead Poisoning 2011-2015, Percentage of Children with Elevated Blood Lead Levels (≥ 5 ug/dL) by Census Tract