LOGAN HEIGHTS PARENTS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FREE TESTING TO DETECT CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING

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One child out of 79 tests positive for lead poisoning—San Diego Housing Commission partnership program helps parents prevent harmful, long-term effects

SAN DIEGO, CA – February 27, 2013 – (RealEstateRama) — The news that her baby daughter tested positive two months ago for lead poisoning was horrifying to Shamli Tarbell. She shared her story as she urged other parents to have their children checked at today’s free blood-lead level testing held by the San Diego Housing Commission’s (SDHC’s) “Home Safe Home” program.

Among the 79 children tested today at King-Chavez Primary Academy in Logan Heights, one child tested positive for high levels of lead. A partnership among SDHC, the Environmental Health Coalition and La Maestra Health Center made the testing possible.

“In just a month, with some of the things we have been able to do, we brought her lead level down,” Tarbell said of her 14-month-old daughter. The Tarbell family lives in a 1920s home from which lead is being removed through SDHC’s “Home Safe Home” program.

“Blood-lead level testing is possible because of a $2.48 million grant awarded last year by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to the San Diego Housing Commission,” said Maria Velasquez, SDHC’s Vice President of Community Relations and Communications. “In addition, HUD has commended the San Diego Housing Commission for a ‘job well done’ in its ‘Home Safe Home’ and lead remediation programs.

To date 542 children have been tested at 7 various community events since 2010. Ten have had high lead levels.

Blood-lead level testing is important because lead poisoning does not produce physical symptoms, said Leticia Ayala, Associate Director of the Environmental Health Coalition.

“Childhood lead poisoning is a silent disease,” Ayala said. “We don’t see it. We don’t smell it. Yet it is hidden in the paint of many of our older homes. There is no safe level of lead exposure.”

Blood-lead levels can be detected easily with noninvasive portable Lead Care II blood analyzers bought by SDHC. The blood analyzers require only a small pinprick to a child’s finger and provide results within three minutes. Families with children who test positive are referred for further medical evaluation.
In addition to blood-lead level testing, SDHC’s “Home Safe Home” program tests older homes for the presence of lead and provides funding to remove the danger from homes.

Although Tarbell had her daughter tested at a doctor’s office, her research led her to SDHC’s “Home Safe Home” program and the Environmental Health Coalition.

SDHC’s “Home Safe Home” program is working with Tarbell and her husband to have the exterior of their home repainted and replace some windows that have lead-based paint and door jams. The Environmental Health Coalition taught Tarbell how to wash toys, hardwood floors and other items in her home to reduce the exposure to lead, Tarbell said.

“It’s important to us that this program exists because it would have been very difficult financially to solve the problem,” Tarbell said.

Grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development fund SDHC’s “Home Safe Home” program, which is overseen by SDHC’s Real Estate Division. Since 2002, SDHC has received $22.47 million in grants.

Although lead-based paint was banned for residential use nationally in 1978, children in homes built before then remain at risk for exposure. Lead is most often found on exterior painted surfaces, interior woodwork, doors and windows, and exposure can come from breathing in or ingesting dust from lead-based paint as it chips or deteriorates over time.

Lead also may be found in the paint on imported toys or those made in the United States before 1978.

In addition to blood testing and lead-based paint remediation, SDHC uses the HUD funds to conduct “Healthy Homes” assessments for such problems as roaches, rodents, dust mites, mold and moisture, poor indoor air quality, and debris or unsafe conditions that can cause injuries.

For more information, visit www.sdhc.org.

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