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Concern over lead gains momentum

A number of county and statewide efforts are under way

Community concern about lead poisoning is gaining the kind of momentum that the issue warrants. Leaders are finally starting to do something substantive about the dangers lead poses to children.

A city ordinance that requires inspections of pre-1978 rental housing as a condition for the issuance of a certificate of occupancy took effect last summer. As this page said, that was only a long overdue start to a more than 30-year problem.

But now a number of efforts locally and statewide are under way. Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks reported Monday that the number of children with lead poisoning had decreased from 3,710 in 1995 to 571 in 2006. That's certainly encouraging. But the problem persists in both Monroe and across New York — with more than 10,000 children diagnosed each year.

The county was awarded a \$3 million federal grant to help clean up 370 more housing units by providing grants of up to \$5,000 to qualified city property owners.

City schools Commissioner Van White, to his credit, has been working on comprehensive lead abatement for the school district. White's proposal requires district schools to be tested for lead, in-service training for custodial staff and annual school reports.

State Sen. James Alesi is sponsoring legislation that would require school districts test their drinking fountains annually for lead contamination. And another bill was introduced that would require the state Health Department to oversee intensive prevention plans in the 30 communities with the most cases of lead poisoning in the previous year.

These are all necessary steps that lawmakers and policymakers shouldn't resist. After all, it's been known for years that lead poisoning can cause harm such as loss of IQ points and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. There's much that our leaders need to try and make up for.

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