

Parents Reminded to Get Children and Homes Tested for Lead

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – In honor of National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week (October 21-27), Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) joined with members of the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning (CPLP) and representatives from the City of Rochester to announce the Coalition's new outreach and education grant. The Congresswoman also toured a CPLP sponsored blood lead testing event at the Anthony Jordan Health Link WIC office on Upper Falls Blvd where the Congresswoman visited with families waiting to get their children tested and spoke with WIC staff members about the importance of testing for lead exposure and ensuring all children get the nutrition they need for strong, healthy bodies.

The Coalition will receive a \$65,000 grant from the City of Rochester to support lead poisoning prevention education and awareness through a \$3 million Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control grant recently awarded to the City of Rochester. The HUD Office Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control promotes local efforts to eliminate dangerous lead hazards from lower income homes; stimulates private sector investment in lead hazard control; and educates the public about the dangers of lead-based paint.

"I want to thank Congresswoman Slaughter and the Coalition for their tireless effort to keep families safe from lead-paint poisoning," said Mayor Thomas S. Richards. "This is a partnership that will have a tremendous impact on the children of this community. The City of Rochester is committed to ensuring its children can grow up in lead-safe homes and maintaining a constant focus on the insidious and nearly invisible dangers of lead exposure."

Congresswoman Slaughter stated, "I advocated for full funding of the HUD Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control Program and am thrilled to see our community directly benefitting from those efforts."

Mel Callan, a family nurse practitioner at Highland Family Medicine and co-chair of the Coalition said, "We are extraordinarily pleased to be here with Congresswoman Slaughter today. Her record as a staunch advocate for children and a champion to reduce lead paint poisoning is a matter of public record." Callan continued, "Our collaborative partnership with the City of Rochester to make sure our community knows to get homes and children tested for exposure to

the permanently debilitating effects of lead paint is one in which we take pride. We are grateful for their generous support."

The major source of lead exposure is lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust found in deteriorating pre-1978 buildings. Lead is a neurotoxin and causes serious health risks in both children and adults including brain damage, behavior issues, hearing loss, kidney damage, and high blood pressure.

In 2011, 222 children in Monroe County were reported with blood lead levels of 10 µg/dl (or micrograms per deciliter) – an 81% reduction since 2001. These encouraging results are attributable to a variety of factors, including community-wide efforts to increase overall testing rates, parent and consumer outreach and education, enforcement of the City of Rochester's Lead Ordinance, and increased use of point-of-care blood lead testing technology. However, this past May, the Centers for Disease Control's Advisory Committee recommended the use of 5 µg/dl only as a reference level to trigger interventions and recognized that no level of lead is safe.

"Any reduction in the number of children permanently damaged by lead poisoning is a great step in the right direction," said Congresswoman Slaughter. "But one child with lead poisoning is one child too many. While it's important to celebrate our hard won community successes, it's imperative that we not let the ball drop, thinking we've accomplished the goal of eliminating lead paint poisoning as a community-wide health hazard—especially since the Centers for Disease Control's recently lowered the reference level for intervention from 10 µg/dl to 5 µg/dl." The Congresswoman continued, "We have to follow NYS law and test each and every child in our community— the science clearly shows that no level of exposure to lead is 'safe!'"

With a grant from the Monroe Plan for Medical Care in 2011, the Coalition partnered with the Anthony Jordan Health Link WIC office, Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency, Western New York Lead Resource Center, University of Rochester Medical Center, and ACM Laboratories to provide regularly scheduled blood lead tests for children and pregnant women. As a result of these testing events, several hundred individuals have been tested – some for the first time and a few were found to have elevated blood lead levels requiring medical intervention. This pilot program will serve as a template for communities seeking innovative ways to increase blood lead testing rates.

"The New York State Department of Health recommends that women who are pregnant or

planning to become pregnant should get a blood lead test and learn how to protect themselves and their babies from lead," stated Dr. Richard Kennedy, a Family Medicine provider at the Anthony Jordan Health Center and a founding member of the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning. Dr. Kennedy continued, "Community-based screenings are a very important complement to health center-based screenings, picking up many of the kids who fall through the cracks. The sooner the high level is found, the sooner the source can be identified and remedied, the sooner kids brains get back to normal development. These kids are our kids—they deserve a head start, not a lead start."