

HOUSING SOLUTIONS LAB



Connecticut children living in older homes are impacted the most

Lead's lingering legacy

Story by **JULIA WALKER**
Photographs by **SARAH GORDON**
The Day

Ledyard

TODDLER MARK NATHAN LINDNER could barely speak for the first three years of his life. He used sign language as his primary form of communication.

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This was partially because of lead poisoning, according to his mother, Rebecca Lindner. Losing the ability to speak is one of many side effects of lead exposure.

While living in the Nathan Lester House, a 1793 historic museum owned by the Town of Ledyard where Lindner served as caretaker, Mark Nathan, who is now 3 years old, had an elevated lead blood level which medical and public health experts say could lead to long-term neurological and physical effects.

The family moved out during the summer of 2022.

Connecticut has a large number of lead poisoning cases because of its old housing stock, said Marta Kostecki, a social worker for Yale-New Haven Hospital's Regional Lead Treatment Center. Lead paint was used in housing until it was



Rebecca Lindner, top, points out paint chips falling from the exterior of her home in Ledyard in July as her son Mark Nathan, 3, plays. Lindner's husband, Corey Watford, above, carries packed belongings as his family moves out.

banned in 1978.

The state's housing stock is older than the national average, with 73% of houses built prior to 1980, compared to 57% nationally, according to the state Department of Public Health.

Out of the reported communities in Connecticut, New London has the second-highest prevalence for lead

poisoning in children under 6 years old, with 12.1% of children in New London having a hazardous level of lead in their blood in 2020.

Most New London County towns have had decreasing reports of lead poisoning in the past three years. However, Norwich's rates have increased by 4.3%, East Lyme's increased 0.9%, and New

London's increased 0.75%.

Poisoning occurs when lead is ingested or absorbed into the body, most commonly caused by deteriorating lead paint creating lead dust and water contamination from lead pipes.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that a blood lead level of 3.5 micrograms per deciliter is higher than most children's levels and that no level of lead in children's blood is considered safe.

Lindner provided medical records showing that Mark Nathan's blood lead levels were elevated. His heel prick lead test presented a lead level of 53 micrograms of lead per deciliter, and his blood lead test presented a lead level of four micrograms per deciliter.

Lindner's 8-year-old son William's medical records said he presented with a lead level of a little less than three micrograms of lead per deciliter.

Mark Nathan's elevated blood lead level was caused in subtle ways, according Lindner.

While he was sleeping, Mark Nathan inhaled invisible lead particles. Above his bed, an air conditioning unit rested inside of a window

SEE IF ONE PAGE A5

West staying course against Russia

New threats should be met with same pressure, leaders say

By **ELLEN KNICKMEYER** and **LORNE COOK**
Associated Press

Washington — How do American leaders and their allies intend to respond if President Vladimir Putin seeks to escalate his way out of a bad situation on Ukraine's battlefields, and makes good on renewed threats of annexing territory or even using nuclear weapons?

At least to start with, by trying to double down on the same tactics that have helped put Russia in a corner in Ukraine, U.S. and European leaders have made clear: more financial penalties and international isolation for Russia, more arms and other backing for Ukraine.

That won't necessarily be easy. It's been tough enough staying the current course of persuading all of

SEE U.S. PAGE A6

RELATED STORY ON **A3**

ELECTION 2022

Stefanowski's frustration is starting to show over abortion

He's tried to make it a campaign non-issue, but Republicans not helping

By **MARK PAZNIOKAS**
The Connecticut Mirror

Bob Stefanowski shifted from foot to foot on stage in Westport's library, agitated at a fellow Republican, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, for generating a fresh round of unwelcome stories about the GOP's desires to restrict abortion.

Stefanowski's efforts to neutralize abortion and gun control as issues in his campaign to unseat Gov. Ned Lamont in Connecticut are undermined regularly, as often by his own party as by Democrats. Last week, his frustration finally spilled out.

"You saw that crazy Lindsey Graham —"

A video of the political forum, which had not been publicized widely outside Westport, shows Stefanowski catching himself.

SEE STEFANOWSKI PAGE A6

WEATHER

Today, morning sun, showers possible late. High 71. Monday, partly sunny, a shower possible. High 73. **E6**

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ELTON JOHN 'FLABBERGASTED' AS BIDEN SURPRISES HIM WITH MEDAL

London — British singer Elton John was left teary eyed and "flabbergasted" after being awarded a surprise national humanities medal by President Joe Biden, following a concert at the White House on Friday night.

John, 75, who was born Reginald Kenneth Dwight, is a world-renowned singer, pianist and songwriter. He has also championed numerous charities and humanitarian causes, especially those tackling HIV/AIDS.

Flanked by the president and first lady, John, wearing his signature red-tinted spectacles, looked visibly shocked as he first spotted the medal, covering his face with his hands in disbelief.

"I'm never flabbergasted, but I'm flabbergasted and humbled and honored by this incredible award from the United States of America," he said, overcome, moments after clutching Jill Biden's hand and hugging her husband. "I will treasure this so much."

The Grammy-winning singer praised "America's kindness to me as a musician," calling it "second to none," and vowed that the medal would push him to redouble his efforts to help eradicate the illness that impacts more than 38 million people globally, according to the World Health Organization.

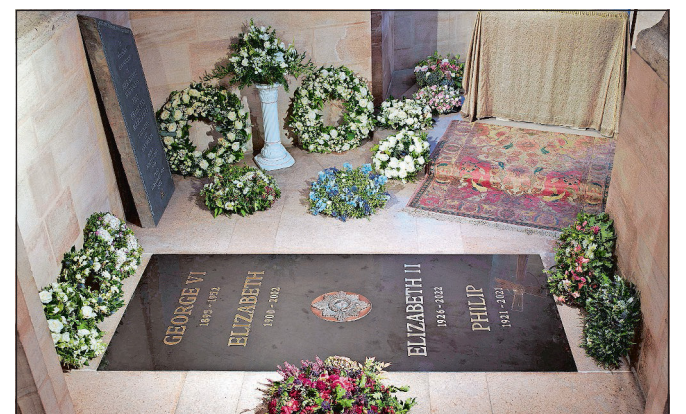
Biden, a big fan, described John as a "tidal wave," quoting Irish poet Seamus Heaney, and praised his "incredible career."

With the White House as his backdrop, John opened with "Your Song," followed by classics including "Tiny Dancer," "Rocket Man" and "Crocodile Rock." He closed with the jaunty "I'm Still Standing."

The concert on the South Lawn, titled "A Night When Hope and History Rhyme," was part of his farewell tour after a glittering 50-year career.

— **The Washington Post**

Queen's resting place



ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST/THE DEAN AND CANONS OF WINDSOR, PA VIA AP
This photo provided by Buckingham Palace on Saturday shows Queen Elizabeth II's resting place at Windsor Castle in Windsor, England.



'If one child is poisoned, it's too many'

FROM A1

frame. During summer months when the air conditioning was on, its vibrations shook lead particles off the window frame and onto Mark Nathan's bed.

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The Crisis

"I just imagine snowflakes coming down," Lindner said. "I imagine lead particles falling like snowflakes onto my kids while they're sleeping."

After baths and showers, his mother said Mark Nathan wrapped himself in lead dust while drying off with a towel. A bin of towels was located beneath another window with an air conditioning unit. Lead particles fell from the window onto the towels. Since Mark Nathan's skin was wet, lead dust stuck onto him and was absorbed into his skin.

Crawling on the floors, Mark Nathan absorbed lead dust through his fingertips and heels of his feet. The floors in the house had originally been coated in lead paint. Lindner said the floors were so chipped they looked like a "rainbow" of multiple layers of dark blue, tan, and brown paint.

Destructive lead exposure can be hard to pinpoint in older and under-maintained housing with lead, like the house Mark Nathan grew up in. Once lead paint begins chipping it becomes a hazard, but nearly invisible lead dust can be just as dangerous.

Subtle to intense effects of lead poisoning

Walking through the Nathan Lester Home this past summer, one could see paint chipping along the exterior and in some rooms indoors. White sheets of paint flaked from the ceiling like pastry crust, threatening to fall to the floor.

Mark Nathan picked up a two-by-four plank of wood and playfully hit it against the siding of the house. Each of Mark Nathan's hits sent paint chips flying off the siding and into the dirt. Lindner pointed out areas where paint separated to form a pattern she described as "alligator skin."

Kostecki said lead poisoning can have side effects as subtle as headaches and irritation — or as intense as loss of speech, seizures and death. Children Kostecki works with sometimes have lower IQs, learning disabilities, and behavioral problems due to lead poisoning.

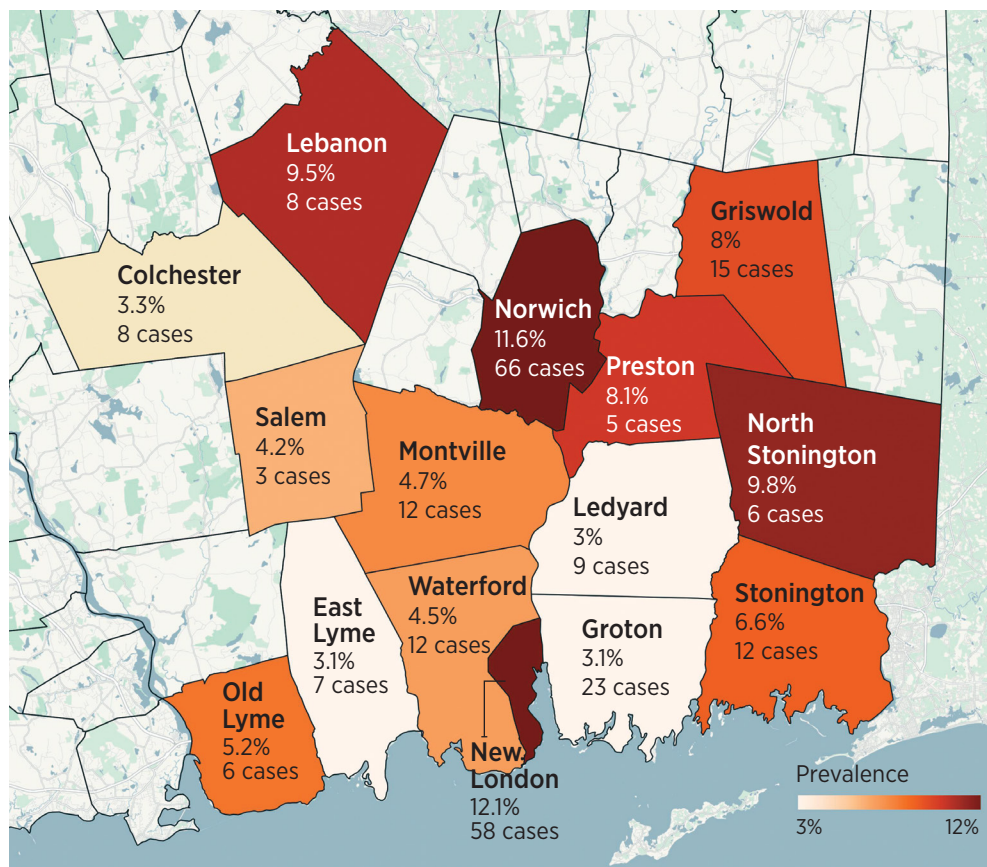
The largest impact Lindner noticed was loss of verbal skills. She said when Mark Nathan lived in the Nathan Lester House, he knew around 15 words, which was below average for his age range. In the first six weeks after they moved out of the home, she said Mark Nathan was suddenly forming complete sentences, identifying colors, and counting up to nine.

All of Lindner's sons have been diagnosed with autism. It is difficult to know whether



Lead alert

The proportion of children under 6 with a confirmed lead test whose blood lead level was 3.5 micrograms per deciliter or greater in 2020



Rebecca Lindner, above, and her sons William, 8, center, and Delan, 10, eat lunch as they take a break from moving at their home in Ledyard in July.

Statistics for towns with less than 50 children tested were not reported if there was any child with an elevated blood lead level. In New London County, those towns were Bozrah, Franklin, Lisbon, Lyme, Sprague and Voluntown.

SCOTT RITTER/THE DAY
DATA: CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH; CTDATA; CARTOBB; CT DEEP

their neurological symptoms come from autism or lead poisoning, since both conditions have overlapping side effects.

Language development, verbal expression, and reading abilities can be impacted by both autism and lead poisoning, Kostecki said. She said both autism and lead poisoning impact the development of the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which controls emotional regulation, focus, and impulse control.

Lindner said it has been difficult to find other families who have struggled with lead poisoning because many families are "tight-lipped" about the issue.

"I think there is such a stigma attached to it," Lindner said. "People think they poisoned their kids, and they feel guilty about it."

As a solution to lead exposure, households can have their homes "remediated" or "abated." Remediation includes repainting and cleaning, while abatement removes any form of lead from the home.

Jesse Good, a New London resident, had his home treated for free through a lead abatement program run by the city. Good said there was lead paint throughout his home and an out-of-use lead pipe in his basement. With two children,

Good decided to sign up for the lead abatement program to minimize their risk of lead poisoning.

New London's Lead Hazard Reduction Program provides lead services to applicants who might not be able to afford to eliminate lead hazards with their own finances. The program also focuses on education surrounding cleaning to reduce hazards of lead.

Judi Cox, who runs the city's lead remediation program, tells families that the most important way to prevent lead poisoning is thoroughly cleaning the house. This includes mopping and using wet wipes. "If one child is poisoned,

it's too many," said Cox, New London housing and community outreach coordinator. "It's completely preventable."

Remediation failure

The Town of Ledyard hired a contractor for painting and cleaning the Nathan Lester House after the Lindner family was exposed to lead.

Lindner claims the contracting work left the house "worse than it started," and the property then failed a second assessment by Ledge Light Health District.

After the failed reassessment, Lindner wanted a lead paint-licensed contractor to repaint every wall of the living

How to stay safe in a home with lead

Do not disturb lead paint without certification

Use contractors who are certified to work with lead paint. Renovating a home without lead-safe practices can increase the hazard for spreading lead dust.

Be thoughtful of where children spend their time

Be aware of lead hazards where children sleep, eat, and play. Windows, radiators, chipping doors, porches, staircases, and the exterior siding of the home have high potential to shed lead dust.

Keep up with cleaning and hygiene

Cleaning with wet mops and wet wipes can limit the amount of lead dust in a home. Washing children's toys, blankets and pacifiers can limit exposure to lead particles. Wash hands often, especially before eating, so that lead dust does not enter the mouth.

Ask for lead level tests

If concerned about lead poisoning in children, parents can ask a health care provider for lead level tests even if children have already completed the tests mandated by the state. Lead levels are tested with blood tests.

Eat nutrients that prevent lead poisoning

The body has difficulty distinguishing lead from other nutrients, such as iron, so if children are iron-deficient and have lead in their stomach, the body will absorb the lead instead of filtering it out. Eating foods that are high in iron, calcium, and vitamin C will decrease the amount of lead absorbed into the stomach.

Sources: Marta Kostecki, social worker for Yale New Haven Toxicology Department; Judi Cox, community and housing outreach coordinator for the city of New London

quarters of the property. She said the Town of Ledyard only instructed the contractor to repaint areas they knew Ledge Light Health District would test.

Ledyard's mayor, Fred Allyn, did not "recall that being completely accurate," and said the town did not know beforehand which areas of the house Ledge Light Health District would test.

Lindner, who does not have lead paint certification, said she was hired by the town to repaint the living quarters of the Nathan Lester House herself. She said the town paid her \$2,000 for the work. Allyn

SEE SOME PAGE A6

New state law, funding address lead issues

By STEN SPINELLA
Day Staff Writer

The Connecticut legislature addressed a dire need this past session by passing a bill meant to align the state's childhood lead poisoning standards with federal standards.

HOUSING LAB
Solutions

The bill takes effect Jan. 1, 2023, and is expected to result in increased testing of children and intervention for those with elevated levels of lead in their blood.

The law lowers from 10 to 3.5 micrograms per deciliter the threshold at which licensed health care institutions and clinical laboratories must report lead poisoning cases to state and local health departments.

Most New London County towns have had decreasing reports of lead poisoning in the past three years, according to the state Department of Public Health. However, Norwich's rates have increased by 4.3%, East Lyme's increased 0.9%, and New Lon-

don's increased 0.75%.

Of the communities who reported blood lead levels, New London had the second-highest prevalence of lead poisoning in children under 6 years old, with 12.1% of children in New London having a hazardous level of lead in their blood in 2020.

The state will be seeking federal approval to add services to address the health impacts of high childhood blood lead levels in children eligible for Medicaid.

State Sen. Heather Somers, R-Groton, ranking member of the Public Health committee, said the committee has been wrestling with this issue for years.

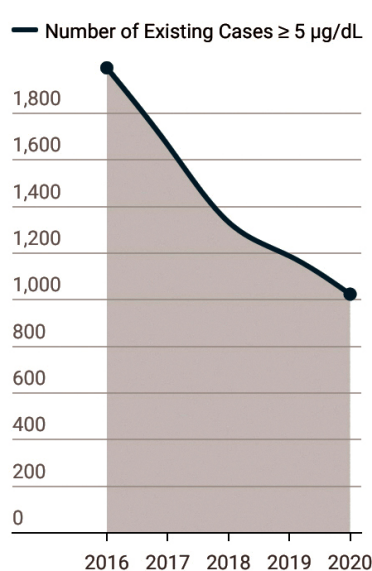
Somers said the main difficulty was that it represented, "a huge cost undertaking for the state and the towns in the long run."

She said the legislature was able to get the bill through this year because of an influx in federal funding.

Connecticut's 2023 budget contains \$30 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funding for lead poisoning case management and home remediation.

Childhood Lead Poisoning in Connecticut

The number of cases is declining, though not in all towns



THE DAY | DATA: CT DEPT OF HEALTH; CTDATA

"The health districts will be involved, and it's going to require more personnel. When children are exposed to this at an early age, it can have permanent cognitive impairments," Somers said. "A lot of it comes from lead paint. You can also find it in old pipes. We have no inventory of the water pipes that are in the roads. Some of them have been there for decades. The way that you test it is to test what's in the water."

Somers said the age of the state's housing stock contributes to the lead problem. The state's housing stock is older than the national average, with 73% of houses being built prior to 1980, compared to 57% nationally, according to the state Department of Public Health.

"A lot of the apartments that young children live in, maybe older apartments...It's not only the pipes that are in the house, it's the pipes coming

In 2020, the state defined an elevated blood level as 5 micrograms per deciliter or greater, left. A new law will lower that threshold to 3.5 micrograms.

to the house from the road. Tracing contamination can take a long time," she said.

Last week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced that Connecticut was awarded \$53 million for water infrastructure improvements under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Part of the funding will be for lead line replacement projects in New London and Waterbury.

"Projects like replacing old water lines, flood mitigation, treating for PFAS, and investing in wastewater systems are costly, but they're essential to everyday life and to our region's economy, and they're critically important for protecting our environment," U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, said in a news release last week.

According to the Washington Post, PFAS are "used to make everyday products like nonstick cookware, cosmetics, fabrics and food packaging," and these dangerous chemicals "permeate drinking water and have been 'linked to an array of illnesses.'" s.spinella@theday.com