Lead Hazard in Toys

The fear of many mothers that cheap toys, such as are found in the 5-and-10-cent stores, are painted with poisonous lead paints is probably groundless. Tests made by Consumers Union on a large number of toys purchased in Woolworth, Kress, and Kresge stores showed no lead in the paints used on any of these toys.

The metals of which many small toys are made, however, are not equally innocent of hazard to young children. Numerous small, one-piece metal toys such as soldiers, automobiles, airplanes, etc. were found to be made of a soft metal alloy containing a high percentage of lead. In no case was the metal completely covered by paint, and in some cases the metal was entirely bare—a serious hazard to young children, who enjoy their toys with their mouths as well as their hands. Bare lead is dangerous even to older children, since it rubs off on the hands and can be carried to the mouth.

The hazard is especially great because lead is a poison which accumulates in the body, and can do great damage in amounts almost infinitesimally small. Some medical authorities believe that lead presents one of the gravest hazards of childhood, being responsible for many obscure ailments which can be diagnosed only with the greatest difficulty. Lead paint used on floors, porches, cribs, and other furniture sometimes causes acute lead poisoning of children. Practically every

one stores some lead in his body from the many foods which are contaminated with lead. The more there is stored up, the greater is the hazard from any additional source of lead. The purchase of lead toys should, therefore, be scrupulously avoided.

Fortunately, the metal alloys which are likely to contain lead can be easily detected. Usually, though not always, they are shiny, and so soft that a deep scratch can be made on them with a nail file or pin. The only small metal toys similar to those described which were found to be free of lead were a number bearing the brand name Tootsietoy.

Repainted toys should be avoided unless there is some way of being assured that lead-free paints were used. In some cities, old toys are collected and repaired and repainted for distribution to children in poor families at Christmas time. There is always the danger that persons unaware of the hazard will use ordinary lead paints. In one city, children were employed to do the repainting, and many of them were poisoned by the lead paints provided for the work.