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19 hospitalized in lead poisoning case

By YAN JIE (China Daily)

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BEIJING - The latest lead poisoning case in Central China's Hunan province has left 19 villagers hospitalized after some of them complained of abdominal pains early this month.



Children take medical assesses to check the amount of lead in their blood at the Children's Hospital in Chenzhou, Central China's Hunan province, on Saturday. [HUA XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY]

This is the second case involving poisoning from lead pollution in Hunan within seven months.

The 19 diagnosed with lead poisoning are undergoing treatment in the Chenzhou Hospital of Chinese Medicine in Chenzhou, a southern city in Hunan, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Some of the sick children were still complaining of abdominal pains, but the majority did not have obvious symptoms, Wang Feixiong, a physician at the hospital, told Xinhua on Saturday.

Of all the patients, one is a 64-year-old villager and the rest are children younger than 14, with the youngest an 11-month-old infant. They have been in hospital since March 16.

If the amount of lead in the human body surpasses 100 micrograms per liter of blood, it can harm the reproductive and nervous systems and cause high blood pressure or anemia. In more severe cases, it can cause convulsions, comas and even death.

People are diagnosed as having lead poisoning when lead levels in their blood exceed 200 micrograms per liter.

The hospital was treating the children with vitamin supplements and trace elements to help them speed up the removal of lead from their blood, said Liu Jianrong, deputy head of the hospital.



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The patients came mainly from two villages in Guiyang county, which is under the administration of Chenzhou.

The city's environment protection department has shut down a scrap lead recycling plant in Guiyang, which has been held accountable for this massive lead poisoning case. Local authorities have also disposed of raw materials and waste metals at the plant.

In September 2009, as many as 254 children younger than 14 were found to have excessive blood-lead levels in Jiahe county, which borders Guiyang county. Four of them, from three villages, were diagnosed with lead poisoning.

A local lead smelter blamed for the massive lead-pollution incident in Jiahe has been shut down, according to a statement posted on the county's official website on Friday.