WHO – Lead poisoning prevention week - 2013

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Medical camp and blood lead estimation

Date: 12-10-2013 to 16-10-2013

Objective of the event:

• To determine the blood lead levels among Hulivesha dancers after application of body paint (pre and post paint application – to negate the environmental lead exposure).

• To find and treat any physical illnesses associated with body paint application or dancing.

Description of the event

‘Hulivesha’ or tiger dance is a performance art form common in the coastal part of Karnataka. The dancers perform various stunts in praise of goddess Sharada, the chief deity in the Dasara festival of coastal Karnataka.

The dancers paint their entire body and perform in front a street audience for the period of 2 to 3 days continuously. The dancers range in the age group of 5 to 60 years of age, usually belonging to the lower socio economic class of the society. The paints used were yellow, orange and red colour synthetic lead enamel paint which studies have shown, contain high lead content.

The Dept. of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology and Dept. of Community Medicine, Father Muller Medical college, Mangalore held a camp on 12th, 13th, 15th and 16th October 2013 under the aegis of the “WHO- Lead poisoning prevention week” where the doctors studied and treated the various ailments seen in the “Hulivesha dancers” after the period of dancing. The numbers of dancers present in the camp were 80 in number. Blood was drawn to study the deviations in the blood parameters in this particular group.

Activities

Pre - paint application camp

Post – paint Application Camp

Rashes on the neck and chest

Rashes on the back

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nausea (14) and dehydration (42). Clinical examination of the children revealed pallor in 18 children, which was confirmed as anaemia on blood tests. Medical help was provided in terms of drugs and referral to our urban health centres for further follow up.

The blood lead levels were analysed and most of the subjects had blood lead levels within the permissible levels (10 micro gram/dl). However, an increase in blood lead levels were noticed after the application and removal of the body paints.

The event was covered in the leading English newspaper, The Hindu1,2.

The event was followed up by Health education sessions in Anganwadi centres which was a joint effort by the Departments of Forensic Medicine and Community Medicine to create awareness among pregnant, lactating and mothers of children about the sources, toxicity and means of preventing lead exposure in day to day life with major emphasis on preventing the neurological toxicity and its sequelae in the longer term.

Reference
