

Funds sought for long-term study of children exposed to mercury

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Published: Saturday, October 21, 2006

FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP — A company that tested children who attended a day-care center contaminated with mercury wants to raise private funds to conduct a long-term study of the children's health.

American Medical Saliva Testing would serve as a conduit for raising funds and coordinating a medical and academic study, owner Gene Elwell said. The company has already partnered with Hyphenated Solutions, an Arkansas-based testing laboratory staffed largely by academics at Arkansas State University.

Parents of children who attended the day-care center before it was shut down in July have pushed hard for such a study. Many say their children have experienced health and developmental problems they had once passed off as standard children's health issues.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state government have already declined to do such a study.

Franklin Township, Gloucester County, residents have some government support for the initiative, however small.

Assemblyman Dave Mayer, D-Gloucester, has lobbied for a study and brought the issue up during an Assembly hearing that was held here Wednesday.

"This is an opportunity to find the long-term (health) problems," Elwell said late Thursday. "That kind of study is monumental. You're talking millions of dollars. That's why the CDC and DEP won't do it."

Elwell believes he can raise the money through private foundations and, potentially, government agencies. He has also offered to donate 10 percent of sales on online kits toward raising money for a study.

His Mount Laurel-based company tested children for mercury levels a few weeks ago, at no cost to parents. Tests have shown children to have mercury levels above normal, though state officials say extant data does not support mercury-related health problems in people unless the mercury levels are much higher. Several have said there is a dearth of information on the long-term effects of low-level mercury exposure to children, which is part of why many want this study.

For more information on the companies involved, see www.amsalivateesting.com

and www.hyphenatedsolutions.com

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