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ON THE WEB

Anyone interested in more information about the nonprofit to aid children affected by mercury at Kiddie Kollege can contact Gene Elwell online at www.amsalivatesting.com or at (856) 858-1456.

Day-care workers team up

By JASON LAUGHLIN
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FRANKLIN

Employees of Kiddie Kollege, a day-care center found to have mercury contamination, have organized a nonprofit to study the extent of poisoning.

The employees are partnering with American Medical Saliva Testing Inc. of Mount Laurel, a company that offers a unique method of testing for heavy metal poisoning through saliva, co-founder and president Gene Elwell said.

"We're looking for medical professionals, experts in mercury poisoning to come forward and get in touch through our Web site," Elwell said.

The group is looking to offer parents help paying for testing and treatment of children affected by the mercury in the day-care facility along with funding the study, Elwell said. They hope to eventually be able to provide guidance to other parents nationwide dealing with the consequences of poisoning from day-care centers. A recent study concluded 14 percent of all day-care centers in the country are contaminated with heavy metals, Elwell said.

The day care closed July 28 after testing found high levels of mercury inside the building, which used to be a thermometer plant. In much of the building the levels of mercury vapor were 25 times acceptable levels. Testing of roughly 60 children and nine adults found a third had elevated levels of mercury. None was considered acute.

But parents remain concerned about the effect the center may have had on their children. During an announcement Sunday morning at the Franklin Township Library, parent Connie Davis said she believed mercury poisoning from Kiddie Kollege was responsible for her 5-year-old daughter Alexis' problems with leg tremors and her facial muscles. One of the organizers of the nonprofit, former day-care employee Vanessa Renzi, has been treated for mercury poisoning herself.

The nonprofit organizers estimate they'll need millions of dollars to provide support for parents of affected children. There could be as many as 100 children poisoned by the mercury, Elwell said. Elwell's company intends to contribute 10 percent from every sale of its \$49.95 heavy metal testing kit to the nonprofit, and the group is seeking assistance from private companies and foundations. They're also seeking aid from the state Department of Environmental Protection, he said.

"They'll always have the mercury in their system but it is treatable," Elwell said. "They will be able to have a full life."

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