

# LETTERS

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## The Social Costs Of Lead Poisonings

The lead poisoning of children in Flint, Michigan, discussed by David Rosner (May 2016), has created a new awareness of a public health crisis that has never left us because the investment needed to remove lead from pipes in high-risk areas was never made. But what is the cost of inaction?

Each year in America there are roughly 90,000 low-level exposures (5–9 micrograms per deciliter), which commonly result from sources such as drinking water.<sup>1</sup> These exposures rob children of IQ points, leading to lower economic productivity, higher welfare use, and additional criminal justice system costs.<sup>2</sup> The lifelong bill for these exposures is about \$50,000 and 0.2 year of perfect health per child (discounted at a rate of 3 percent).<sup>2</sup>

In Flint there were more than 8,000 documented exposures,<sup>3</sup> with the costs amounting to about \$400 million and 1,760 quality-adjusted life-years lost.

Thus, in an effort that would have saved approximately \$5 million from switching the water source from April 2014 to the present date, the city of Flint will suffer net present losses of \$395 million—even before accounting for the \$58 million already spent by the state on medical care and water provisions or its toll on health.

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### NOTES

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