

# Aussie family speaks out about lead-poisoned child

August 3 2010

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The mother of a schoolgirl at the centre of a lead contamination dispute in a north Australian mining town Tuesday spoke of her concern about her daughter's deteriorating health.

Daphne Hare said her eight-year-old daughter Stella was spending increasing amounts of time in hospital with health and [learning difficulties](#) related to the elevated levels of [lead](#) in her blood.

"She's not a well child at the moment. She's got gastro-intestinal problems... and intellectual disabilities," Hare told AFP.

"She's having problems in areas where (teachers) explain things to her, and ten seconds later she's forgotten what they said," she added of her daughter's struggles at school.

"She's receiving counselling to deal with her [intellectual disabilities](#)."

The Hares are one of seven families suing Anglo-Swiss mining giant Xstrata over alleged lead toxicity in the town of Mt Isa, where a study this week estimated one child developed lead poisoning every nine days.

Blood tests revealed dangerously high levels of lead and 10 other metals in Stella's body, and her lawyers are set to argue this caused her health problems and can only be the fault of XStrata.

Stella first started showing symptoms three years ago, when she was just

five years old, and Hare said it had been "very, very hard financially and emotionally".

"We had everything once, and now we're just living to make ends meet," she said.

A study published in the Medical Journal of Australia this week found about 11 percent of the 400 children born every year in the town had excessive lead in their blood, and there was little question about its origin.

"The evidence is clear. There is a single primary source of environmental lead in Mt Isa: the historic and ongoing mining and smelting activity," wrote study author Mark Taylor.

Xstrata has operated two copper mines and a copper smelter in Mt Isa since 2003, and denies being the source of the contamination.

"Mt Isa has one of the most intensive air quality monitoring systems of any city in Australia, which directs our smelters to shut down whenever emissions may potentially impact the community," said Xstrata spokesman Steve de Kruijff.

Lawyer Damian Scattini, who is representing Hare and other affected families, said the report was "yet another nail in the coffin of the defendants' contention that it's all naturally-occurring and benign".

"It's beyond question: the fact that the lead emanates from the mine and the smelter," he said.

For Hare, however, the case went beyond compensation or a question of sums.

"You can't put a price on a child," she said.

"For me it's about what they're doing with these kids. It's about justice for these children."

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Citation: Aussie family speaks out about lead-poisoned child (2010, August 3) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-08-aussie-family-lead-poisoned-child.html>

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