

EAST KALGOORLIE PRIMARY SCHOOL — MERCURY CONTAMINATION

50. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the closure of East Kalgoorlie Primary School due to the potential hazardous presence of mercury at the school.

- (1) Given mercury is an insidious poison that can lead to damaged motor skills and intelligence disorders, and put children at risk for long-term neurological damage, would the Minister for Health make sure that all potentially exposed children are tested, as a matter of public health, to ensure that there has been no harmful exposure to mercury?
- (2) Is any work being carried out to determine whether other parts of Kalgoorlie are contaminated by mercury as East Kalgoorlie is?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

- (1)–(2) I can advise that a number of state government agencies are working in response to the contamination that was found at East Kalgoorlie Primary School, and I am cognisant of the stress that that has created amongst the school community. My colleague the Minister for Education was there this morning, with the Chief Health Officer, meeting with the school community and with parents.

The Department of Health is leading the response, and an incident management team is in place as we speak. We are standing up testing. People can test anywhere, but a testing facility for the community and for children is now or is imminently about to be stood up. Although the levels detected so far are relatively low and not linked to or associated with side effects, we are making testing available to the community to ensure that those parents can rest assured. The Department of Health is taking a very cautious approach to this. As I said, the initial sampling is not usually associated with side effects, but I absolutely acknowledge the concern of the school and the parents.

As I said, the Chief Health Officer is onsite, working with the incident management team, and will be leading the response. It will take a couple of weeks to complete the testing, the school will remain closed for at least two weeks while the testing is undertaken, and alternative arrangements are being made by my colleague the Minister for Education.

For the health response, I can confirm that an incident management team is stood up, the Chief Health Officer is onsite, and testing either is or will be available. Any GP or primary healthcare provider can also provide testing.