



NEWS

Cases Of Glitter Lung On The Rise Among Elementary-School Art Teachers

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CHICAGO—The Occupational Safety And Health Administration released figures Monday indicating that record numbers of elementary-school art teachers are falling victim to pneumosarklyosis, commonly known as glitter lung.

Nearly 8,000 cases were reported in 2004, the most recent year for which statistics are available. This is the highest number since the arts-and-crafts industry was deregulated in 1988.

Characterized by a lack of creative energy and shortness of breath, and accompanied by sneezing or coughing up flakes of twinkly, reflective matter, glitter lung typically strikes teachers between the ages of 29 to 60 who spend

20 hours per week in an art-class setting during the school year.

"When art teachers spend so much time in confined quarters with inadequate ventilation amid swirling clouds of glitter, it's only a matter of time before their lungs start to suffer

negative effects," said Dr. Linda Norr, a specialist in elementary-school-related respiratory diseases. "Those sufferers who are not put on a rigorous program of treatment often spend their last days on respirators, hacking up a thick, dazzling mucus."



As incidences of glitter lung continue to rise, critics are accusing public schools of not doing enough to protect art teachers.

Former art teacher Miles Winfield, who recently testified before a House subcommittee on unsafe working conditions, said that, as his symptoms worsened, his principal looked the other way, fearing defamation lawsuits from the powerful glitter industry.

"Most art teachers are afraid to come forward, for fear of losing their jobs," Winfield said. "At an absolute minimum, an art teacher should be equipped with a respirator, thick goggles, and a reflective-field smock. But schools don't want to stand up to Big Glitter, which continues to insist that this stuff is safe. Schools end up falsifying the safety reports and hoping they get away with it. And they usually do."

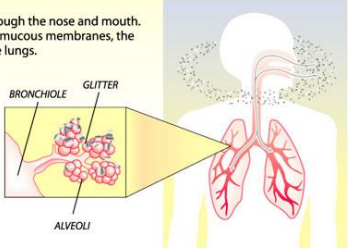
Until heavier, less toxic forms of glitter are developed, physicians recommend using alternative media to enhance children's artwork.

"Cheerios, cotton balls, and popsicle sticks are considered very safe," Norr said. "Avoid colored string, however, because some studies show that it could

What Is Glitter Lung?

Glitter lung, or pneumosparkylosis, is a respiratory disease caused by the chronic inhalation of precision-cut, iridescent, metallized particles. Elementary-school art teachers and transgendered "drag queen" entertainers are the populations most at risk.

- 1 Airborne glitter enters through the nose and mouth. First attracted to glue-like mucous membranes, the glitter then settles into the lungs.
- 2 Glitter deposits cause scarring, inflammation, and twinkliness of the lungs, leading to bedazzlema—a condition in which alveoli are so sparkly that oxygen molecules are reflected away from the bloodstream.
- 3 Eventually, the alveoli become completely decorated and are unable to function, leading to massive system failure due to oxygen starvation. Although the dangers of glitter lung are just now becoming known, the body's intolerance of shiny substances has been studied for decades (see "Symptoms and treatments of goldfingeritis," *New England Journal Of Medicine*, 1964).



be high in yarcinogens. And if glitter is absolutely essential to the craft project, try using a glitter pen, as the particles are less likely to become airborne."

Glitter guidelines established by OSHA in 1970 allow for no more than 0.4 flakes per cm³ of the substance in the air. Yet critics say the standards were developed to protect children, who typically only spend two to three hours in art class per week, unlike teachers, who spend as many as 40 hours per week in the toxic, high-glitter environment.

Though only 47 years old, Lawrence, KS art teacher Helen Niles was forced to quit her job and lose her health insurance after her chronic glitter lung rendered her unfit for full-time work in February.

"At first, I had no idea what was going on," Niles said. "I'd wake up in the morning and I'd have this gritty feel in

my mouth. The school nurse told me it was nothing, but eventually I was waking up with a shiny, sparkling stain on the pillow."

"People who have worked with glitter know that it gets everywhere if you don't sprinkle it very carefully. It can stick to your clothes and your skin," Niles said.

"Imagine working in an environment where the atmosphere contains 10 parts per million, and you quickly realize what our nation's art teachers are up against."

The medical community has been slow to recognize glitter lung as a public health threat. A 1993 epidemic of sequin fibrosis, which primarily affected dancers in the Las Vegas, NV area, was seen as an isolated case. Now, however,

the disease is being re-evaluated, and many doctors believe it may be the most serious occupational health hazard to hit educators since the outbreak of gold-star syndrome in the 1960s.

Epidemiologists note that the increase in glitter-lung cases is occurring simultaneously with a general rise in other classroom-related diseases. Macaroni elbow, modeling clay palsy, crayon flu, and googly-eye are sidelining thousands of teachers each year.

But despite growing medical alarm, efforts to provide adequate safety measures and health care continue to be hampered by bureaucratic red, blue, green, and yellow tape.