

PRACTICE PREVENTION

Children and Toxins – What's the Fuss?

Today's children are exposed every day to a wide variety of environmental chemicals in the food they eat, the water they drink, and the air they breathe. These chemicals can be found in everyday products that are under your kitchen sink or in your laundry room, basement, bathroom or garage. Many of these chemicals and heavy metals, such as lead, mercury, some plastics, pesticides, flame retardants and solvents, are known to be harmful to children, particularly to their developing nervous systems and brains.

Why Are Children at Greater Risk from Toxic Chemicals?

Children are not just "little adults." Pound for pound, children are exposed to greater amounts of toxic chemicals because they eat, drink, and breathe more for their size than adults.¹ Children also generally live closer to the ground. When they play on floors, for example, they can come in contact with dust that may carry toxic chemicals from insecticides, household cleaners, paint, plastic and some fabrics. Children may also be exposed to chemicals tracked in from outdoors, such as pesticides. In addition, children frequently put their hands and other objects in their mouths. Hands and objects that have chemical residues on them further increase their exposure.

Another reason children are at higher risk is that their bodies are growing rapidly. Even small amounts of toxic exposures during critical developmental periods can harm children's health, sometimes for life. For example, exposures to mercury or lead early in life can impact the nervous system and brain, potentially contributing to learning, behavioral and developmental disabilities.²

How Can These Harmful Exposures Be Prevented?

You can help protect your current and future children by taking simple steps in your home and garden to reduce everyday exposures to harmful chemicals.

1) Don't bring toxins into your home. Many products that people use in their homes – such as cleaners, paints, and pest control – contain highly toxic materials. To make healthier choices about products you use:

§ Look at the ingredients and warning labels on packages to help you decide whether to buy products. More complete information, including a list of many products, their ingredients, and their effects, is available on the website of National Institutes of Health at householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov.

§ Find out about non- or less toxic alternatives for almost everything from cosmetics to appliances. See www.chec.greenhome.com/products/.

§ Buy or make your own nontoxic cleaning products. See www.housekeeping.about.com/cs/environment/a/alternateclean.htm.

§ Avoid using pesticides. See www.beyondpesticides.org/how_to/ for alternatives to chemical pesticides.

§ Reduce or eliminate your use of tobacco products, alcohol, and solvents, such as inks and glues.

§ Have family and guests remove their shoes at the door. Harmful contaminants like pesticides are easily picked up on shoe bottoms and can be tracked across the floors where your children play.

§ Avoid purchasing food packaged in plastics or cling wrap, including children's convenience foods such as puddings, snack trays and juice drinks.³ Baby bottles and children's dishes are sometimes made

from dangerous plastics, too. See
[www.chechnet.org/healthhouse/education/
articles-products.asp](http://www.chechnet.org/healthhouse/education/articles-products.asp).