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Protect Your Child

From Environmental Health Risks

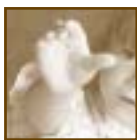


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Protect Your Child

From Environmental Health Risks

As a parent, you want your child to be safe. But pollutants can cause health problems for children that can follow them through life. Over time, the harm can build up.

Your child is at much greater risk than you are from these hazards because she:

- Is still growing inside. Her organs are young and may be harmed by chemicals and other dangers. Her immune system is still developing.
- Takes in more air, food, and liquids per pound than you do. That means she can take in more harmful substances than you do.
- Crawls, plays on the floor, puts her hands in her mouth, and spends a lot of time outdoors. Just being a child exposes her to environmental hazards.

This booklet will tell you about several health risks in the world around us and how you can help keep your child safe from them.

LEAD Poisoning

You cannot see, taste, or smell lead, so you can have it in or near your home without even knowing it. Lead can be in dust, paint, soil, or water. It can be found in food or on toys. It can even be on your child's hands.

If your child is poisoned by lead, it can limit his IQ, cause him to have problems with reading and learning, harm his hearing, reduce his attention span, make him too active, slow his growth, and even damage his brain.

What can you do?

- If you live in a house built before 1978, have it tested for lead. A certified lead inspector can do this.
- If you think your child is at high risk for lead poisoning, have his blood tested for lead at 6 months. Test again at 12, 18, and 24 months. After that, have him tested once a year until he is 6. You should have his blood tested at age 1 and again at age 2 even if you do not think he is at risk.
- Keep everything clean. Wash pacifiers, bottles, and toys often in hot, soapy water. Keep the area where your child plays as clean as possible. Mop floors and wipe window ledges and cribs with all-purpose cleaner. Have your child wash his hands before meals, at nap time, and at bedtime.
- If you find out your home has lead paint in it, have a contractor permanently wall up the paint or remove it. Use someone who has received special training and is certified. Your child should not be at home while the work is being done, and the work area should be cleaned well once the work is finished.



- Pipes and plumbing fittings or fixtures bought before August 1998 may have lead in them. That lead can get into your water, so have your water tested. Call the county health department to find out how.
- If you have lead in your water, do not drink, cook, or make baby formula with water from the hot water tap. Run the cold water for 30 to 60 seconds before drinking it or using it for cooking if you haven't used it for more than two hours. It's best to get rid of the pipe or plumbing parts that are causing the problem or to buy a water filter that will remove lead.

- Make sure your child eats foods high in iron and calcium. He will absorb less lead if he does.

For More Information:

National Lead Information Center at (800) 424-LEAD or on the Web at <www.epa.gov/lead> for general lead information.

Kentucky Department for Public Health at (502) 564-4537 for a list of lead inspectors and contractors certified to remove lead paint from your home.

PESTICIDES

Pesticides are in bug spray, flea collars, garden weed killer, and rat poison. Your baby can put things in her mouth that have pesticides on them. She can also come in contact with pesticides when she crawls or plays where they have been used. She can be exposed to even more pesticides if she eats lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.

If pesticides aren't used right, they can cause birth defects. They can make your child's allergies or asthma worse, cause nerve damage, or cause cancer.

What can you do?

- First, try something besides pesticides to get rid of pests. You can get rid of the food or water that attracts them or get rid of the places where they breed and hide. Use traps instead of pesticides, or pull weeds. Even birds and insects can be used to control pests.
- Keep pesticides in a locked cabinet or garden shed out of your child's reach. Always store them in the container they came in, and never use the container to store something else when the pesticide is gone.
- Post the nationwide number for the poison control center near your phone. It is (800) 222-1222.
- Before you buy a pesticide, be sure you know what you are going to use it for. Your local county Extension office can help you identify insects, weeds, and plant diseases so you can find the best way to control the pest.



- Follow the directions on the pesticide's label. Mix pesticides outdoors in a place with a lot of fresh air. Wash your hands after using pesticides. Remove your clothes right after you use them and wash them in hot, soapy water apart from other clothes.
- Make sure your child is not around while you are using pesticides.
- Keep both your child and your house clean. Have your child wash her hands often with warm water and soap, especially before eating. Clean bottles, pacifiers, toys, floors, and windowsills often.
- Try to buy only the pesticides you need so you do not have to store leftovers. Never pour pesticides down the sink, sewer, street drain, or into the toilet. Give leftovers to neighbors to use if they have the same pest problem. Always make sure any pesticide you give away is in the container it came in with the label still on it.

- Wash all fruits and vegetables well and scrub them or peel them if you can. Limit the pesticides you use on your own vegetable garden.

For More Information:

National Pesticide Information Center at (800) 858-7378 for general pesticide information.

Poison Control Center at (800) 222-1222.

TOXIC

Household Chemicals

Toxic (poisonous) household chemicals include bleach, lighter fluid, oven cleaner, batteries, mercury thermometers, toilet and drain cleaners, shoe and furniture polishes, and gasoline. These chemicals can burn your child's skin or eyes, make him feel sick to his stomach or dizzy, or cause him to itch. They can slow his growth, damage his lungs, or cause cancer.

What can you do?

- Use products without chemicals in them when you can. You can use a plunger to unclog your sink, clean with baking soda or vinegar, and use non-mercury thermometers.
- Store toxic household chemicals in a locked cabinet out of your child's reach. Always store them in the container they came in and away from heat or sparks. Store batteries and gasoline in the shade away from direct sunlight.
- Follow label directions. Never use more than the label says to use, and never mix two products together. Make sure your child is somewhere else when you are using these chemicals.
- Post the number of the poison control center near your phone (800-222-1222).
- Keep a bottle of ipecac syrup on hand in case you need to get your child to vomit. Don't make him vomit unless a doctor or your contact at the poison control center tells you to.

- Do not keep toxic chemicals that you don't use often. Instead, give them to someone who can use them. Never burn toxic chemicals or dump them on your property. Recycle oil, antifreeze, and products that have mercury in them.

For More Information:

Poison Control Center at (800) 222-1222.

POLLUTED

Water and Contaminated Fish

Bacteria and viruses in water can cause your child to have an upset stomach, diarrhea, or worse. Too much nitrate in the water can cause “blue baby” syndrome. If your child is exposed to certain kinds of water pollution before she is born or in the first few months of life, it can harm her nervous system. Eating certain kinds of fresh fish from polluted waters can also cause problems.

What can you do?

- If you have your own water source, have it tested once a year. Have it tested in the spring if you can. Call your local health department or your county Extension office to obtain a list of labs that will do the testing.
- If you have a well, make sure it is located as far as possible from your septic system and uphill from nearby farm fields, live-stock operations, or other possible sources of pollution.
- If your drinking water comes from a local water system, read the system’s annual water quality report. Ask about anything you don’t understand.
- Use a home water-treatment system only if you have to. Make sure the one you choose will treat the problem you have. Take care of the system, and change the filters regularly.
- Do not feed your child freshwater fish if the state has put out a warning about it. Sometimes there is a special warning for pregnant women, nursing mothers, babies, and children.

- Do not let your child swim in lakes or rivers that are closed because of raw sewage or other pollution.

For More Information:

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources at (800) 858-1549 for information about warnings on eating fish.

Safe Drinking Water Hotline at (800) 426-4791 for general drinking water information.

Kentucky Department for Public Health at (502) 564-7181 or your county health department for information about warnings on eating fish and swim advisories.



CARBON

Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is a gas that has no color, taste, or odor. It comes from car exhaust and appliances like gas heaters, furnaces, stoves, and dryers. If these appliances are not hooked up right or not taken care of, carbon monoxide escapes, and your child can breathe it in. Carbon monoxide can cause you and your child to have a headache, weakness, dizziness, nausea, or vomiting. He can have brain damage or go into a coma. Carbon monoxide can also kill.

What can you do?

- Have your furnaces, flues, chimneys, and fuel-burning appliances checked once a year.
- Do not use barbecue grills indoors.
- Never heat your home with gas ovens or burners.
- Do not use unvented gas or kerosene heaters in a room where your child sleeps. If you use them in other rooms in the house, have them checked once a year.
- Never let cars or lawnmowers idle in the garage. Have your vehicle's exhaust system checked regularly.
- Install an approved carbon-monoxide alarm near where your child sleeps. Change the batteries regularly.
- Never use a gas-powered generator indoors.

For More Information:

Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse at (800) 438-4318 for information on carbon monoxide poisoning prevention.

ASBESTOS

Fibers

Asbestos can cause cancer. It was used a lot in school buildings until the 1970s, so your child is more likely to be exposed to it than some other materials. If asbestos is tightly contained, it is not dangerous. But asbestos fibers can be breathed in while they are breaking down or being destroyed. Once that happens, asbestos fibers can't be removed from the lungs. Exposure over time is the most dangerous. There are no tests to show whether your child has been exposed to asbestos. The only way to find out is to inspect the buildings where children live and play.

What can you do?

- Have your house inspected if it was built before 1980 and you think it has asbestos in it. Call your local health department for a list of certified asbestos examiners.
- If you have asbestos and it is breaking down or you are planning work on your home, hire a certified contractor to remove it.
- Do not allow your child to play near asbestos.

For More Information:

Kentucky Division of Air Quality at (502) 573-3382 about asbestos and asbestos removal.

ASTHMA

And Air Pollution

Asthma is the leading chronic illness in children in the United States. Pollutants in the air can cause an asthma attack. A child is especially at risk because he breathes faster than an adult, so he inhales more of what's bad in the air at a faster rate. His airways are narrow to begin with, and asthma causes those airways to get smaller, making it hard to breathe. Ozone, sulfur dioxide, plant pollen, and mold spores can all trigger an attack. So can pets, cockroaches, and damp basements.

What can you do?

- Keep your child indoors when ozone is high. If he has asthma and allergies, keep him indoors when there is an alert of a high pollen count.
- Keep your house clean. Clean your carpets, and mop often. Use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter (high-efficiency particulate air filter) or bag. Wash toys in hot water and dry them often. Keep animals outside or out of the bedroom of a child who has asthma.
- Make sure any appliances that burn fuel are vented outdoors. Have them checked once a year.
- Control the moisture in your home. Do not let water stand in the basement, and fix all leaks immediately. Use a dehumidifier or air conditioner in warm, humid weather. Use a hygrometer to monitor your home's humidity. You can buy one at a hardware store.

- Do not smoke and do not let others smoke in your home or car. If a family member insists on smoking, open windows or use exhaust fans to increase ventilation in the area where the smoking occurs. Encourage smokers to not smoke when children are around.
- The droppings or body parts of cockroaches and rodents can trigger your child's asthma. Do not leave food out, and clean all crumbs or spilled liquids right away. Try poison baits, boric acid, or traps before using pesticides. If you do use a pesticide, follow the directions carefully and spray only the infested area. Make sure there is lots of fresh air moving around where you are spraying.

For More Information:

EPA "No Attacks" campaign via the Internet at <www.noattacks.org> or via phone at (866) NO-ATTACKS (662-8822) for general information and resources.

American Lung Association via the Internet at <www.lungusa.org/asthma/>.

RADON Gas

Radon is a radioactive gas that is made when radium decays. It gets into the home through cracks in the foundation, porous cinder blocks, and granite walls. Radon causes lung cancer. Seventeen to 25 percent of Kentucky's houses may have more radon than is thought to be safe.

What can you do?

- Check for radon with a home test kit. If the test shows your home has too much radon, you can reduce risk by sealing cracks in the foundation and increasing the flow of air throughout the house.
- If you have radon in your home, ban cigarette smoking indoors. It increases the chance of lung cancer.
- If you have radon in your home or think you might, keep your child out of the basement as much as you can. Radon levels can be especially high there.

For More Information:

Radon hotline at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at (800) 767-7236.

Call for the booklet *Radon Reduction Methods: A Homeowner's Guide* and other publications about radon.

Kentucky Radon Program at (502) 564-4856 for information about radon in Kentucky.

TOBACCO

Smoke

Many young children spend a lot of time indoors. If there is smoking in the home, they are at high risk for the problems tobacco smoke can cause. Children can have breathing problems or ear infections or get bronchitis or pneumonia from it. Tobacco smoke can make asthma worse. It can cause problems in later life like lung cancer, heart disease, and emphysema.

What can you do?

- Do not smoke in the house or car or around your child. Ask visitors to go outside to smoke.
- If someone does smoke in your home, open windows or use exhaust fans. This will help draw out the smoke and move the air in the house around.
- Talk to your teenager about the dangers of smoking. Encourage him not to start smoking. Let him know how easy it would be for him to become addicted and how hard it is to stop.

For More Information:

Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse at (800) 438-4318 for general information about tobacco smoke indoors.

Smoke-Free Home Pledge Hotline at (800) 513-1157 to take the smoke-free home pledge and receive a smoke-free home kit.

SUN

Getting Too Much

Too much sun can be dangerous to your child, and she gets most of it before she is 18. If she burns easily, has blond or red hair, or has blue, green, or gray eyes, she is more apt to get skin cancer. If she gets a bad sunburn as a child, she is more likely to get the most deadly form of skin cancer when she is older. Too much sun can also hurt her immune system and her eyes.

What can you do?

- Keep your baby out of direct sunlight if she is under 6 months. Dress her in cool, light-colored clothing and in hats with brims. Her skin is thinner than yours, so it's easier for her to get sunburned.
- Use sunscreen if your child is over 6 months. The higher the SPF (sun protection factor) rating on the sunscreen, the more it protects. Use a lot of sunscreen on her and rub it in well. Put it on again every two hours. Use sunscreen even on cloudy days. Sun rays can penetrate the clouds.
- Dress your child in light-colored, firmly woven clothing. Look for summer clothes with SPF ratings.
- Limit how much time your child spends in the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. That is when the sun's damaging rays are strongest.
- Protect your child's eyes from the sun. Dress her in a hat with a full brim and sunglasses that fit well. Large lenses near the surface of the eye work best.
- Warn your teenager about using tanning beds and sunlamps. They can hurt the skin and eyes.



For More Information:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Stratospheric Ozone Hotline at (800) 296-1996 for information about the UV Index.

National Safety Council Environmental Health Center Web site at <www.nsc.org/ehc/sunSAFE.htm> for sun safety information.

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Note: All online references were available on the Web as of March 29, 2002.

For more information about general children's environmental health issues, contact:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Children's Health Protection at
(877) 590-KIDS (590-5437) (toll-free)
<www.epa.gov/children>
- National Safety Council Environmental
Health Center at (202) 293-2270
<www.nsc.org/ehc.htm>

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In an Emergency
Call the Poison
Control Center
at

(800) 222-1222

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