



Do you know?

Childhood brain disorders like autism, ADHD, and learning disabilities are on the rise. Researchers are working to understand how contact with chemicals might play a part in these disorders. It is important to be aware how our children are exposed to chemicals, what those chemicals do, and how we can avoid them.

Coming into contact with what is considered a “safe” amount of chemicals for adults can harm babies and young children. Companies don’t always find out if the chemicals in their products are safe for infants and children.

Limiting chemicals in our environment *(continued)*

Household

- Clean surfaces like windowsills and floors with a damp cloth and mop to pick up the dust where chemicals settle.
- Frequently wash children’s hands and toys with regular (not antibacterial) soap and water.
- Avoid the need for pest control products by immediately cleaning up food spills and crumbs, keeping trash tightly sealed and taking it out daily.
- Look for furniture – especially crib mattresses – made without chemical flame-retardants.
- If you must use chemical products to kill pests, make sure the windows are open (to allow for air flow) and that you keep young children away. If at all possible, avoid using these products while you are pregnant and/or breastfeeding.
- Shampoo and brush pets frequently to control fleas and use shampoos that don’t contain chemicals that kill pests.

Personal Care and Clothing

- Look for personal care products labeled “phthalate free”.
- Look for products that do not contain “trichlosan” or “trichlocarban”.
- Buy tightfitting sleepwear for infants and young children that do not contain flame-retardants.
- Wash clothes immediately after purchasing to remove any chemical residue from factories.

Please see our website for more information:
http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/mindinstitute/resources/environmental_health.html

How do we create a safe, healthy environment for our babies?



UC Davis Center for Children’s Environmental Health





Introduction

Babies and young children are more sensitive than adults to things like chemicals in the environment. While adult bodies can handle occasional contact with small amounts of chemicals, the same amount can have serious and lasting effects on children's developing bodies and brains.

What are chemicals?

We are exposed to chemicals everyday just going about our normal lives. Chemicals can be manmade or occur naturally in the environment. They can include things like pest control products, additives to keep food from spoiling, cleaners, and soaps.

What do we mean by "environment"?

It may involve more than you think! A child's environment includes what they eat, what they breathe, and what touches their skin. During pregnancy and while breastfeeding, it includes anything the mother eats, breathes, or touches.

Why are babies more at risk?

For their size, babies and children eat, drink and breathe more than adults do. They also tend to put more things in their mouths, and spend more time on the floor where chemicals settle.

It's safe for me...why isn't it safe for my baby?

- Chemicals are more harmful when brains are developing. Most of brain growth occurs when a baby is in the womb. In fact, the brain grows the fastest during the first 5 weeks of pregnancy!
- Huge amounts of brain growth also happen during the first years of life. By age 3, a child's brain is already at 80% of its adult size.
- All of this growth takes a lot of energy and resources. It is also a very delicate process. Chemicals entering your baby's body can interrupt or change that process and alter brain development.

NOTE: Many skills necessary for doing well in school depend on abilities babies gain during this time, like language. Limiting chemical exposures gives babies their best chance at being successful in school.

So, how do we limit the chemicals in our children's environment?

Chemicals that mothers are exposed to before, during, and after pregnancy can be passed to the baby through the placenta and during breastfeeding.

Food

- Try your best to buy organic fruits and vegetables, which are free from chemicals. Wash and peel vegetables that are not organic.

- Follow health advisories about eating fish. State public health agencies provide advice about the types of fish that are safest to eat and how much fish is safe for pregnant women and children to eat.

- Store and microwave food in glass containers instead of plastic.

NOTE: Prenatal vitamins with extra folic acid have been found to reduce risk for autism and other brain disorders when taken before and during pregnancy.

Outdoors

- Wash children's hands if they have been playing on grass where chemicals that kill pests may have been applied
- If you work in a job where chemicals are used to kill pests (farming or landscaping), remove your work clothes before entering the house and wash these clothes separately.

(Continued on back of brochure)

