

Simple Steps to Protect Your Family from Toxins in Our Everyday World

Presented by: Dr. Maida Galvez, a pediatrician and the Director of the Mount Sinai Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) and Rhonda Sherwood, Vice Chairman of the Mount Sinai Children's Environmental Health Center.

The greatest threats to the health of children growing up today in the United States are no longer infectious diseases such as polio, chicken pox, mumps, cholera or malaria. Increasingly they are chronic diseases such as autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, asthma, obesity, diabetes and pediatric cancers—and these are on the rise.

80,000 chemicals have been created since WW II and of them 2,800 are high production volume (HPV) chemicals whose production exceeds 1 million pounds a year. Fewer than 20% of these HPV chemicals have been tested for their possible toxicity to children.

The presentation provided an overview of the latest science and provided simple steps for ways to minimize exposure to toxins in everyday life. In the absence of federal regulations or guidelines, Dr. Galvez and Ms. Sherwood advise taking a precautionary approach and looking for safer alternatives.

Q. Why are Children more vulnerable to environmental exposures?

A. Children are not small adults.

- Children may have disproportionate exposures to environmental toxins because pound-for-pound, they consume more food, water, and breathe more air.
- Children have unique, age appropriate behaviors - in particular, hand-to-mouth behaviors.
- Children may be less able than adults to expel certain toxins.
- Children are undergoing rapid growth and development and have windows of vulnerability in which the course of development can be permanently changed by environmental toxins.
- Because children have more future years of life than adults, they have more time to develop chronic diseases cause by multiple exposures.

Simple Steps:

Wash Your Hands. Use soap (antibacterial-free) and warm water. Anti-bacterial products may encourage the creation of bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics.

Wet dust and Wet mop your home. Leave Your Shoes at the Door. These are easy ways to reduce chemicals in your home and your bodies!

Lead

No level of lead is safe. If you live in a home that was built pre-1980, you may have lead paint. If renovating your home, only wet sand painted areas and be sure your children leave during the process. All children should have a blood test for lead when they are 1 and 2 years of age.

Mercury

Eat Fish, But Chose Wisely. Children under six, as well as women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, are the most vulnerable to methylmercury's harmful effects. High levels of methylmercury can be found in ahi or bigeye tuna, tilefish, swordfish, shark, king mackerel, and fish caught in any waters that are subject to a mercury advisory.

Plastics: Researchers are concerned about plastics because phthalates and BPA act in ways similar to hormones naturally found in our body.

Look for BPA-free and PVC-free stickers or labels.

Check recycling numbers:

Safer numbers are 5, 4, 1, and 2.

Avoid numbers 3, 6 and 7.

Code #3 indicates PVC or vinyl and can contain phthalates.

Code #6 indicates polystyrene foam and can release styrene.

Code #7 indicates "other" plastics, which includes polycarbonate.

Not all code #7 plastics bottles contain polycarbonate, but those that do leach Bisphenol-A (BPA).

Remember: "5, 4, 1, 2, all the rest are bad for you!"

Do not put plastics in the microwave or dishwasher. The heat can increase leaching of chemicals out of the plastic into food and beverages. Do not microwave or heat plastic cling wraps.

Use glass, stainless steel or metal free ceramic containers when possible.

Personal Care Products: "Fragrance" can be a catch-all word for a product's that may contain phthalates or other chemical preservatives. Check ingredient lists and look for botanically based fragrance.

Avoid the Green Guide's "Dirty Dozen."

"Fragrance," antibacterials, formaldehyde, hydroquinone, mercury/lead, parabens, phenylenediamine, coal tar colors, diethanolamine, 1,4 dioxane, nanoparticles, and petroleum distillates.

Cleaning Products

Homemade Cleaners can be less toxic. The safest cleaners are plain old water, baking soda, lemon juice and vinegar.

Pesticides

Avoid pesticides inside and outside of your home. Pesticides are harmful to humans and animals when used on your lawn, trees and the flower beds. Use integrated pest management (IPM) in your home, live with a few dandelions and appreciate the look of a natural lawn.

Wash Your Fruits and Veggies. Buy local and reduce your carbon footprint!

Go Organic When You Can! Fruits and Vegetables with the highest pesticide risk per serving (in order high to low): peaches, apples, sweet bell peppers, celery, nectarines, strawberries, and cherries.

To learn more about the CEHC and our research at Mount Sinai visit www.cehcenter.org or call (212) 824-7125.

To speak with a health professional, if your child has been exposed call the Mount Sinai Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) at 1-866-265-6201.

If you would like to support our research or clinical endeavors, call (212) 659-8500 and speak with the Mount Sinai Development Office.

[Additional Resources:](#)

Fish: <http://nrdc.org/health/effects/mercury/>

Plastics:

http://www.mountsinai.org/img/vgn_Ink/Regular%20Content/File/Departments/Community%20and%20Preventive%20Medicine/BPA_Patient_Factsheet.pdf

Personal Care Ingredient List: <http://www.thegreenguide.com/personal-care/dirty-dozen>

Personal Care Database: www.cosmeticsdatabase.com

Homemade Cleaning Product Ingredients and Recipes:

<http://www.greenerchoices.org/products.cfm?product=greencleaning&page=RightChoices>

Green Cleaner Consumer Brand List:

<http://www.ogs.state.ny.us/bldgadmin/environmental/ProductLists.html>