

TOXIC MATTERS



Toxic substances are synthetic chemicals and metals that can harm your health. Everyone can be exposed to many toxic substances every day and these exposures can affect all aspects of reproductive health. This brochure provides information on steps you can take to prevent or reduce your exposure to toxic substances and to protect your health and your family's health.

Exposure to toxic substances can harm the reproductive systems of women and men and can make it more difficult to get pregnant. Because developing fetuses and children are especially vulnerable, exposure to even small amounts of toxic substances in the womb or during infancy, childhood or puberty can lead to disease early or later in life and across generations. Some toxic substances build up in our bodies and can affect our health and future pregnancies long after exposure has occurred. Therefore, the recommendations in this brochure are designed for women, men and children. They apply to everyone, whether or not you have children, are pregnant or want to have children in the future.

**A Publication of the University of California, San Francisco
Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment
From Advancing Science to Ensuring Prevention (FASTEP)**

FASTEP is an alliance of academic, government and non-governmental partners spanning the fields of reproductive, environmental, occupational and pediatric health and toxicology. Our goal is to secure each and everyone's right to optimal reproductive health by fostering environments that prevent exposure to toxic substances and support healthy pregnancies, children, adults and future generations.

This brochure offers practical recommendations on how to avoid exposure to common substances encountered in everyday life that can be harmful to reproductive health. It is not a complete list. For more information, please check the sources provided in the **To Learn More** section of this brochure.

5 THINGS TO DO

PREVENT EXPOSURE AT HOME



PREVENT EXPOSURE AT WORK



PREVENT EXPOSURE IN YOUR COMMUNITY



BECOME A SMART CONSUMER



MAKE THE GOVERNMENT WORK FOR YOU



To view this brochure online, go to: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/toxicmatters.html

PREVENT EXPOSURE AT HOME

Do not smoke.

- Talk to your doctor if you need help quitting.
- Do not let people smoke around you and stay away from public spaces where smoking is allowed.

Use non-toxic personal care products. Personal care products may contain many ingredients, such as phthalates, that can harm reproductive health.

- Find safer products at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#personalcare

Do not spray bugs. Do not use pesticides, which are toxic chemicals made to kill unwanted insects, rodents, weeds, bacteria and mold.

- Keep insects and rodents out of your home: clean up food crumbs and spills; store food in tightly-closed containers; seal cracks around doors, window sills and baseboards; repair drips and holes; and get rid of standing water.
- Use baits and traps instead of sprays, dusts and bombs.
- Do not use chemical tick-and-flea collars, flea baths, applications or flea dips.
- Hire only *licensed* pesticide applicators.
- Find pesticide-free alternatives at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#pestcontrol

Get out your wet mop. Toxic substances like lead, pesticides and flame retardants are present in house dust. Sweeping or dusting surfaces with dry cloths can spread the dust into the air instead of removing it from your home.

- Use a wet mop and wet cloth to clean floors and surfaces.
- Take off your shoes. Shoes can bring pesticides and toxic chemicals inside your home.
- Wipe shoes on a sturdy doormat if you choose to keep shoes on.

Clean your home with non-toxic cleaning products.

- It is easy and inexpensive to make effective, non-toxic cleaners using common items like vinegar and baking soda. Find out how to shop for non-toxic cleaning products and get recipes to make your own at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#cleaningproducts

Avoid dry-cleaning your clothes. Most dry-cleaning systems use a chemical called perchloroethylene (PERC), which gets released from dry-cleaned clothes and pollutes the air in your home.

- Use water instead. Most clothes labeled as “dry-clean only” can be washed with water. Hand wash these clothes or ask your dry cleaner to wet clean them for you.

Pick your plastics carefully. Some plastics release toxic chemicals such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC), phthalates and bisphenol A (BPA).

- Do not buy products made with soft PVC. For example, some shower curtains and toys are made with soft PVC.
- Do not use plastic containers for hot food or drinks. Choose glass or stainless steel.
- Use glass instead of plastics in the microwave.
- Learn more about plastics at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#plastics

Choose safer home improvements. Many paints, glues and flooring materials can release toxic chemicals long after the project is complete.

- Ask for *VOC-free* and *water-based* materials.
- If you are pregnant, do not work on remodeling projects and stay away from recently remodeled rooms.
- Learn more about safer materials at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#remodeling

Keep mercury out of your diet, home and garbage.

- Choose fish that are less contaminated with mercury. Find information on healthy and environmentally sustainable fish at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#mercury
- Check local fish advisories. If you or others go fishing, never eat your catch before checking fish advisories. Learn about fish advisories at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#mercury
- Replace your mercury thermometer with a digital one. Do not throw your mercury thermometer or any other item containing mercury (like compact fluorescent light bulbs) in the trash. Your local health department can tell you where to bring these items for safe disposal. To contact your local health department, check the government section of your phone book or call the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at: 800-232-4636.

Avoid pesticides and other toxic substances in food and water.

- Eat local, organic food when possible to reduce your exposure to pesticides. Buying organic produce also reduces global contamination of air, water and soil with pesticides. If you can't afford to buy organic produce all the time, choose the least pesticide-contaminated fruits and vegetables and avoid the most contaminated. Learn more about reducing pesticide exposure from food at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#foodandwater
- Join a local organic Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) system. These systems are efficient and grow food in ways that protect our health and the environment. Find a CSA system in your area at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#foodandwater
- Limit foods high in animal fat. Toxic substances that are persistent in the environment concentrate in animal fat.
- Avoid canned foods and beverages whenever possible. Eat fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables to avoid exposure to BPA, a toxic substance used in the resin that lines the majority of canned foods and drinks.
- Request a copy of your annual water quality report from your water district. If your drinking water comes from a private well, have it tested every year. In most cases, bottled water is not a solution, but instead creates further pollution.

Avoid lead exposure. Lead may be in household paint, dust and soil. Any home built before 1978 may have lead paint.

- Call the National Lead Information Center for information about how to prevent exposure to lead hazards at: 800-424-LEAD.
- If you have lead paint in your home, make sure it is covered with a fresh coat of paint, wallpaper or tiles.
- Never sand or remove lead paint yourself. Hire a contractor who is certified in lead abatement.

Test your home for radon, a radioactive gas found in many basements and ground floors.

- Purchase an inexpensive testing kit at your local hardware store.
- Learn more about radon by calling 1-800-SOS-RADON or at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#radon

PREVENT EXPOSURE AT WORK

Many substances used in different jobs, present in office buildings or used in workplace renovation projects are toxic to reproductive health.

By law, you have the right to a safe and healthy work environment.

- Get information and training about hazardous substances in your workplace. Your employer is required by law to provide information and training about hazards in the workplace, including access to Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS). Follow guidelines to avoid exposure and use protective gear. Ask your employer about substitutes for toxic substances and other hazard controls.
- If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy and are exposed at work to substances that may cause harm, request modification of your duties. Talk to your doctor or your union for guidance.
- If somebody in your household works with toxic chemicals, he or she should change and shower after work and keep work tools and clothing away from people and living areas in the home. Wash work clothes separately.
- File a complaint with your regional Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office if you believe that your employer is violating OSHA standards or that your workplace poses serious hazards. You can find a directory of regional OSHA offices where you can get more information or file a complaint by calling 800-232-4636 or at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#work
- If you are a farm worker, you can find information about reducing your exposure to agricultural pesticides at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#work

PREVENT EXPOSURE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Outside your home, on the road, in parks and in schools, you can do things that reduce pollution in your community and limit your exposure to pollution in outdoor air.

Help create a better environment for your family and everyone around you.

- Drive less. Carpool, take public transportation, ride your bike or walk.
- Never burn trash, particularly furniture, tires and plastics.
- Do not use pesticides. If you have a garden or lawn or share a community or school garden, use organic or integrated pest management techniques to fight off weeds and unwanted insects. Learn more at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#community
- Never throw toxic substances, including oil, gasoline, pesticides, paints, solvents and medicines, down drains or toilets or in the garbage. Your local health department will give you information on how to safely dispose of these substances. To contact your local health department, check the government section of your phone book or call the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 800-232-4636.

Reduce your exposure to pollution in outdoor air.

- Exercise as far away as possible from sources of air pollution, such as heavy traffic or factories.
- Do not exercise outdoors on bad air quality days. Check air quality forecasts in the newspaper, on TV or radio, or online at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#airquality

BECOME A SMART CONSUMER

Many of the products you use everyday may be made with toxic substances. When you buy and use these products, you expose yourself and your family to toxic substances and contribute to a cycle of manufacturing, use and disposal that pollutes our environment. The use of toxic substances exposes workers, consumers and the general public. Choose safer, non-toxic alternatives. This will help stop the toxic cycle and send a message to companies that make and sell consumer goods that they need to switch to healthier options.

There are many consumer guides available to help you find non-toxic products. You can find links to many of these guides at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#consumerguide

MAKE THE GOVERNMENT WORK FOR YOU

Individual actions alone cannot prevent exposure to substances in the environment that harm our reproductive health. This is because some toxic substances remain in the environment, concentrate in the food chain, and find their way into our bodies. Some substances can travel long distances in water and air currents, contaminating the environment and affecting communities far away from the place where those substances were released. Other toxic substances do not remain in the environment for long but are constantly being released, so we are exposed to them on a regular basis. These types of exposures can only be prevented by public policies that stop chemical pollution in the first place.

You can influence public policy.

- Become informed about these issues.
- Get involved with local, state and national organizations working to prevent pollution.
- Let your representatives know what you think. You can find contact information for your state and federal representatives at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#government

Support policies that prevent pollution.

We need policies that:

- Identify existing toxic substances, phase out their use and replace them with alternatives that are safer for human health and the environment.
- Require that new chemicals be tested for health and safety before they are allowed to be produced or sold.
- Improve worker protection by reducing permissible occupational exposure levels and giving workers access to more complete and accurate information about workplace hazards.
- Expand the nature and extent of the information given to consumers about the ingredients in the products they buy.

To Learn More

This brochure lists just some of the many ways you can prevent exposure to substances that can harm reproductive health. The prevention measures described here are based on recommendations by the leading authorities on environmental and occupational health listed below. Find links to these resources at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#authorities

American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Environmental Health. Etzel RA, ed. *Pediatric Environmental Health*, 2nd ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003.

Physicians for Social Responsibility. *Pediatric Environmental Health Toolkit*®, endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

University of California, San Francisco and the Collaborative on Health and the Environment. *Shaping Our Legacy: Reproductive Health and the Environment*.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. For recommendations on how to protect the environment at home and in the garden, at work, at school, while shopping, in your community and on the road.

California Department of Public Health Hazard Evaluation System and Information Service (HESIS). For answers to questions or concerns about workplace hazards contact the HESIS helpline at: 866-282-5516.

Your local health department can also provide more information on preventing exposure to toxic substances. To contact your local health department, check the government section of your phone book or call the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 800-232-4636.

More Resources. Find links to many supplemental resources that provide practical tips for avoiding exposure to toxic substances at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#tips

About Us

From Advancing Science to Ensuring Prevention is a project of the University of California, San Francisco Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment (PRHE). PRHE's mission is to create a healthier environment for human reproduction and development by advancing scientific inquiry, clinical care and health policies that prevent exposures to harmful chemicals in our environment.

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