

Risks Associated with Bisphenol A in Baby Bottles

Products marketed for children are not always safe especially for young children in their critical stage of development. Bisphenol A (BPA) is one of the toxic chemicals found in some products including many popular brands of baby bottles.

What is Bisphenol A?

Bisphenol A (BPA) was developed in 1891 as a synthetic estrogen hormone and came into general use in the 1950s when scientists realized it could be used in making reusable plastic and food and beverage cans.

Today, the industrial chemical BPA is most commonly used in products such as baby bottles, reusable water bottles, sippy cups, dental sealants, compact disks, digital video discs, eyeglasses, plastic utensils, certain microwaveable plastic containers and epoxy resins (coatings that line food containers). These products may have the triangle recycle symbol with "7" inside the arrows or the letters "PC". More than 6 billion pounds of BPA are produced each year.

What are the possible health effects?

Scientists have linked very low doses of BPA exposure to cancers, impaired immune functions, early puberty, obesity, diabetes, hyperactivity and other problems. Recent animal studies have shown that even exposure to low-dose BPA can have negative health impacts.

Concerns about the use of BPA in consumer products grabbed more attention this year when several governments issued reports questioning its safety and some retailers pulled products made with it off their shelves. There is a disagreement between public health advocates and the plastics industry regarding toxicity of BPA. The plastics industry says there is little concern with human exposure levels.

In April 2008 the National Toxicology Program of the National Institutes of Health raised concerns that exposure to BPA during pregnancy and childhood could affect human development. Pregnant women, infants and young children are most vulnerable to the harmful effects of BPA. The FDA is looking into concerns about the safety of BPA. A bill has been introduced in the US Congress to prohibit the use of BPA in all food and drink containers. The US Senate is also considering expanding the proposed ban to include toys and other children's products.

What are the sources and ways of human exposure?

While air, dust and water are possible sources of exposure to BPA, the main source of exposure for most people is ingestion of food. BPA has been found to leach from bottles and can liners into milk, formula, foods and beverages.

Tips for reducing exposure to BPA

- Avoid reusable polycarbonate plastic water and baby bottles. When purchasing baby bottles, consider purchasing bottles that are made without BPA. Using glass is a good alternative.
- Avoid heating foods in plastic containers. Use glass or ceramic dishes.
- Do not put plastic containers in the dishwasher. Harsh alkaline detergents increase the leaching of BPA.
- Reduce the use of canned foods and canned drinks.
- Ask your dentist for BPA-free sealants and composite fillings.

References and Resources

Rachel Gibson (2007), Toxic Baby Bottles. Environment California Research and Policy Center. <https://environmentcaliforniacenter.org/>

Environmental Working Group at www.ewg.org

NTP Brief on Bisphenol A (September 2008). Online at <https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/ntp/ohat/bisphenol/bisphenol.pdf>

The Oregon Environmental Council at www.oeconline.org

