



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RISKS AND YOUR PREGNANCY



American Association
on Intellectual and
Developmental Disabilities

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There are many factors in your physical environment that could harm not only your health, but also the health of your unborn baby. The good news is you can take simple steps to reduce these risks.

This brochure describes the most common household, outdoor, and workplace hazards and tells what you can do to make things safer for you and your developing baby.

At Home



The fewer the products and chemicals, the better.

You might be expecting now, but soon you will have a small person running around, getting into everything.

Reduce the number of toxic products around your home, and you will reduce the risk to your unborn baby and toddler-to-be! Here are some ideas...

Cleaning Products

A strong smell, even if pleasant, means your cleaning product has chemicals that can affect you and your baby. This includes laundry detergent, kitchen and bathroom cleaners, floor cleaners, and dust sprays. What you can do:

- ◆ As you begin by buying new safer products, participate in toxic recycling days to get rid of old products you no longer use. Keep products in your cabinets minimal!
- ◆ Change to cleaners that are fragrance-free or homemade, like baking soda, peroxide, salt water, or distilled white vinegar. For more information on how to clean with vinegar, go to www.vinegartips.com.

Personal Care Products

Personal care products contain chemicals that enter your body as you use them. These chemicals can affect your unborn baby's hormones and brain growth. What you can do:

- ◆ Cut down on the number of personal care products you use. That includes your cosmetics, lotions, hair products, sprays, and colognes.
- ◆ Switch to safer personal care products. Look up the safety of your products in the Skin Deep database at www.cosmeticsdatabase.com. You can also buy products from companies who have signed the safe cosmetics compact. See a list at www.safecosmetics.org.

Pesticides

Pesticides include products used to kill household "pests," such as bugs, weeds, fungus, mold, and bacteria. Even common herbicides that kill weeds and antibacterial soaps that kill bacteria are considered pesticides.

Pesticides kill pests in two main ways: they either damage a pest's nervous system so that it dies, or they damage its reproductive tract so that it cannot multiply. These chemicals not only work on pests, but they also work on the brain and reproductive systems of you and your baby. Studies have shown that people who use pesticides at home also have pesticides in their bodies. If you are exposed to pesticides while you are pregnant, the effects could show up much later in your child. Such effects may include behavior disorders, learning disabilities, reproductive problems, or susceptibility to cancer and other diseases. What you can do:

- ◆ Avoid being near pesticides and herbicides at all times.
- ◆ Keep your house clean and dusted to avoid pests.
- ◆ Instead of using bug spray, use a fly swatter to kill pests.
- ◆ Wear gloves when gardening and use simple home-made mixtures to kill weeds like poison ivy in your yard. See www.thriftyfun.com.
- ◆ Never handle cat litter when pregnant.
- ◆ Avoid tracking pesticides and herbicides from the outdoors, such as your yard, into your home. Pets, like people can also track these toxins from outside.
- ◆ Prevent rodents! Rodents can carry lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus (LCMV). If a pregnant woman is infected with LCMV, it can pass to the unborn baby and cause severe abnormalities or loss of the pregnancy. Take steps to prevent rodents from getting into your house. If they do get in, use non-toxic alternatives to get rid of them.
- ◆ Check out the low-harm fact sheet and non-toxic ways to get rid of pests at: www.beyondpesticides.org.



Foods

You and your unborn baby *are* what *you* eat and drink. So, give your baby the best start by making the most healthy, nutritious food choices. What you can do:

- ◆ Avoid toxic foods that contain pesticides and preservatives. For a list of the foods with the highest and lowest levels of pesticides go to: www.foodnews.org.
- ◆ Eat organic fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.
- ◆ Always wash your fruits and veggies before eating.
- ◆ Eat foods free of artificial food colors and additives if you can.
- ◆ Eat fewer or smaller servings of fish while pregnant. Smaller fish are low in toxic mercury and high in heart healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Avoid shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish. For more info check your local government fish advisories.
- ◆ Drink water that is filtered and clean. Get your drinking water tested if you are uncertain about its quality. Read your local Consumer Confidence Report at www.epa.gov.

Plastics

Bisphenol A (BPA) is a chemical found in hard, clear plastics, food can linings, and other products. BPA can disrupt the body's hormonal system at very low levels.

In animal studies, it has been linked to cancers, behavior disorders, reproductive problems, obesity, and diabetes. What you can do:

- ◆ Buy glass baby bottles or plastic baby bottles marked "BPA Free" which are available at many stores.
- ◆ Avoid storing food and drink using plastic. For example, use a glass or metal container instead of using plastic to contain leftovers; use foil rather than plastic to wrap foods directly; and use a metal thermos for drinks on the go rather than drinking from plastic bottles.



- ◆ Do not microwave food or drink wrapped in plastic wrap or contained in plastic containers, especially plastic baby bottles. Toxic chemicals move from plastic into food and drink, and into your bodies.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a big threat to your baby. If you drink alcohol during pregnancy, it could cause damage to your baby's developing brain, leading to learning disabilities, behavior disorders, or other intellectual and developmental disabilities. In fact, fetal alcohol syndrome is one of the leading preventable causes of mental retardation and birth defects. What you can do:

- ◆ Avoid all alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Smoking

If you either smoke or are exposed to second-hand smoke during pregnancy, you put your baby at higher risk of low birth weight and developmental language and speech problems later in life. Exposure to secondhand smoke puts your baby at higher risk of having ear infections and asthma, and is linked with Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). What you can do:

- ◆ Do not smoke if you are pregnant.
- ◆ Make your home and car smoke-free zones.
- ◆ Take a smoke free home pledge at www.epa.gov/smokefree/pledge/index.html.

Mold

Mold isn't just a bother. It can also have negative health effects on you and your baby. It is normal to have some mold in your house. But if there is a source of constant moisture in the house, like a water leak, mold can grow and become a health hazard. What you can do:

- ◆ If you can see or smell mold in your home, you have a mold problem! No testing is necessary. But if you are not sure, use a do-it-yourself kit available at most home stores or hire a company that specializes in mold testing.
- ◆ Eliminate the mold according to specific safe handling guidelines and fix the moisture source. Again, you can do it yourself or hire a company. For more information on the right way to clean up mold, go to www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html.

Safety Risks

Do a quick safety check on your home to protect yourself and your baby. What you can do:

- ◆ Check to make sure your smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors work.
- ◆ Test your home for radon.
- ◆ Have your home and water tested for lead.
- ◆ Make your body and home "smoke free."
- ◆ Test your well for contaminants if you have well water.

Outdoors

Protect yourself against outdoor chemicals.

Many kinds of herbicides and pesticides are found in drinking water at low concentrations in agricultural areas. If you live in an agricultural area, here's what you can do:



- ◆ Have your water tested if you can. In many towns, testing is free or low-cost.
- ◆ Filter your drinking water with a good quality filter.
- ◆ If crops are being sprayed from planes or field sprayers, or if your neighborhood is being sprayed close to houses and buildings, it is very important for you to avoid these chemicals. If you cannot leave the immediate area until spraying is done, then close your windows until the spraying is done.
- ◆ Avoid tracking outdoor chemicals into your house. Remove contaminated clothing or shoes before entering your home.

Outdoor air quality

- ◆ Check the Air Quality Index (AQI). The AQI is a scale of air quality that ranges from 0 to 500 and is used in many weather reports. An AQI score of over 100 indicates unhealthy air conditions. These conditions can make it difficult for pregnant women to breathe easily, especially later in pregnancy. Try to stay indoors in air conditioning when air quality is poor.

At Work

Advocate for yourself and get the facts.

Many jobs involve working with chemicals, such as factory workers, lab techs, artists, and beauty shop employees, like nail techs and hair stylists.



If you work around chemicals, remember that you and your baby deserve to stay healthy! Here's what you can do:

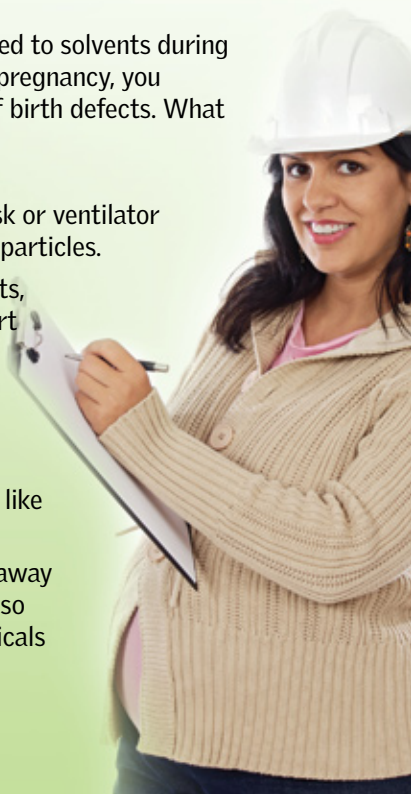
Talk With Your Supervisor and Get Informed

- ◆ Tell your supervisor that you are pregnant, if possible. Most employers value their workers and wouldn't want to expose their pregnant employees to hazards, both for moral and practical purposes. Women with healthy pregnancies are often able to continue work until delivery, saving employers from hiring and training a new worker.
- ◆ Ask your supervisor about the safety measures in place at work to protect female workers during their reproductive years.
- ◆ If you work with chemicals, ask your supervisor for the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for that chemical or product. It tells whether a chemical may be unsafe for you or your baby. If you can't get an MSDS, find out what the name of the chemical is and look up the MSDS under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration website at www.osha.gov.
- ◆ If the chemical you are working with is hazardous, ask your supervisor for protective equipment.

Avoid Exposure To Solvents

Solvents are chemicals that dissolve other substances, like alcohols, degreasers, paint thinners, and varnish removers. If you are exposed to solvents during the first trimester of your pregnancy, you increase your baby's risk of birth defects. What you can do:

- ◆ Be sure to wear a mask or ventilator to screen out harmful particles.
- ◆ Wear gloves, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt to protect your skin.
- ◆ Keep the windows open to avoid inhaling paint fumes.
- ◆ Practice good hygiene like washing your hands.
- ◆ Keep food and drinks away from where you work so you don't ingest chemicals by accident.



Protect Yourself From Radiation

Workplace exposures to radiation during pregnancy can harm your developing child. What you can do:

- ◆ Speak with the responsible person at your job about monitoring for radiation exposure. It is important to track exposure as early in pregnancy as possible and avoid radiation if possible.
- ◆ If you work in a setting where you may be exposed to radiation, like a hospital, you can ask for and get shielding aprons for your stomach/abdomen, and straps for your neck/thyroid gland.

Talk To Your Doctor

Discuss your responsibilities at work, your health history, and your work environment with your doctor to assess for possible reproductive hazards.

Plan Ahead

If you are planning a pregnancy, think ahead and learn about the potentially dangerous substances in your work area. For more information, go to:

- ◆ www.ehinitiative.org
- ◆ www.aaid.org
- ◆ www.cdc.gov/nchddd/reproductivehealth
- ◆ www.cdc.gov/niosh
- ◆ www.marchofdimes.com
- ◆ www.motherrisk.org
- ◆ www.healthandenvironment.org
- ◆ www.healthychildrenproject.org

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