

Protecting Children from Pesticides

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The 1996, Food Quality Protection Act, set tougher standards to protect infants and children from pesticide risks. EPA is enforcing these tougher standards, which include an additional safety factor to account for developmental risks and incomplete data when considering a pesticide's effect on infants and children, and any special sensitivity and exposure to pesticide chemicals that infants and children may have.

EPA has taken action when the Agency has identified risks to children. For example in August 1999, EPA announced cancellation of major "kid's food" uses of the organophosphate (OP) pesticide methyl parathion and significant restrictions on the use of another OP, azinphos methyl. Scientific data indicate that these uses do not provide the extra measure of protection FQPA demands for children.

EPA is reassessing all OP residue limits. In addition to the OP's, the Agency has targeted several other high-risk pesticides for priority review including atrazine, aldicarb and carbendazim, among others.

For the first time, EPA is requiring hundreds of additional studies on pesticides to better understand their effects on children specifically (developmental neurotoxicity, acute and sub-chronic neurotoxicity). In addition, EPA has developed new tests and risk assessment methods to target the factors unique to infants and children.

EPA has registered many new, safer pesticides in recent years that constitute lower-risk alternatives to more toxic pesticides such as the organophosphates. It has also distributed a consumer information brochure to grocery stores nationwide and launched an interactive web site to give consumers vital information about pesticides in food: <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/food>.

EPA is undertaking a screening and testing program to address concerns expressed by scientists in recent years that chemicals might be disrupting the [endocrine system](#) — the glands and the hormones they produce that guide the development, growth, reproduction, and behavior of human beings and animals. Disruption of the endocrine system may result in reproductive disorders, birth defects, immune suppression, and other harmful effects.

Kids need Protection

Children are at a greater risk for some pesticides for a number of reasons. Children's internal organs are still developing and maturing and their enzymatic, metabolic, and immune systems may provide less natural protection than those of an adult. There are "critical periods" in human development when exposure to a toxin can permanently alter the way an individual's biological system operates. Children may be exposed more to certain pesticides because often they eat different foods than adults.

For instance, children typically consume larger quantities of milk, applesauce, and orange juice per pound of body weight than do adults. Children's behaviors, such as playing on the floor or on the lawn where pesticides are commonly applied, or putting objects in their mouths, increase their chances of exposure to pesticides.

Adverse effects of pesticide exposure range from mild symptoms of dizziness and nausea to serious, long-term neurological, developmental and reproductive disorders. Americans use more than a billion pounds of pesticides each year to combat pests on farm crops, in homes, places of business, schools, parks, hospitals, and other public places.