



ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS DURING PREGNANCY

There are many chemicals in the air, in homes, and in businesses that could hurt you or your baby's health during pregnancy. This handout tells how to avoid pesticides, dangerous chemicals, and lead, which may be harmful to you or your baby.

How Can I Avoid Pesticides During Pregnancy?

Pesticides are chemicals used to kill bugs. They are found in water, on fruits, vegetables, in gardens and parks, and most places plants grow. Make sure to wash all fruits and vegetables before eating them. It is a good idea to peel them, too. Pregnant women should avoid pesticides, but if you have to use them:

- Have someone else apply the chemical.
- Avoid being in the area where pesticides have been used for 24 hours.
- Remove food, dishes, towels, and eating utensils from the area where pesticides are used.

If you have to use pesticides yourself, wear gloves and clothing that you can wash.

Are Cleaning Products Dangerous?

There are lots of chemicals used in cleaning products. Make sure to read the labels for warnings for pregnant women. *NEVER* use anything labeled "toxic." Do not mix ammonia and chlorine products. The mixture makes a gas that is harmful for anyone. There are many natural products, which can be safer to use during pregnancy. If you use any cleaning products, make sure to wear thick rubber gloves, and open the windows to get rid of the fumes.

What About Beauty Products During Pregnancy?

Chemicals used in nail salons are very dangerous. They let off fumes that can be very toxic, and you should avoid them while you are pregnant. If you cannot avoid them, make sure there is an open window or door for fresh air. To be on the safe side, you should not use artificial fingernails while you're pregnant. Hair products such as dyes, permanents, and straighteners are safe to use during pregnancy. You will get a very small amount of the chemical into your body from your scalp, but there are no reports that this exposure is harmful to you or your baby.

How Can I Avoid Lead Exposure?

Lead can be damaging to the nervous system. It has been illegal to use lead in making household products since 1978, but lead might be found in the paint and pipes present in older homes. Other sources of lead include drinking water from old pipes, lead crystal glassware, some ceramic dishes, wicks of scented candles, and the plastic grips on some hand tools. Lead may also be found in some arts and crafts materials, such as oil paints, ceramic glazes, and stained glass supplies.

If you think you have lead paint in your home, you can paint over it with latex paint, or there are ways to have it removed safely. You should not be in or around the house for several hours when this happens. If you think your water may have lead in it, contact your state health department to find out how to get your pipes tested. Many home water filters do not remove lead, so you should read their labels carefully.

Some pregnant women have a desire to eat clay soil or chips of clay pottery. This is called "pica" and can result in lead poisoning. Let your health care provider know if you are eating clay.

- Never use tap water to prepare infant formula.
- Only use cold tap water and let the water run for 30 to 60 seconds before drinking it.
- If you are worried about the pipes in your home, use a reverse osmosis water filter such as the "Brita" type. Many home water filters do not remove lead, so you need to read their labels carefully.



Certain craft supplies: Stained glass material, oil paints, ceramic glazes

Watercolor or acrylic paints and glazes



Tap water: Water that has not been tested or you think is unsafe. If you have any concerns about the quality of your water, call your local health department or check with your health care provider.

In the United States, in general, tap water is safe, but it is always important to know that the water you are drinking—from the tap or bottled—has been tested.

NEVER use tap water to prepare infant formula



Lead Paint: Homes built before 1978 may have lead paint. If you suspect lead paint, call a professional to remove it.

DO NOT TOUCH paint that is crumbling or peeling. Make sure to stay away when it is being removed or sanded.



Pesticides: Found in gardens, on fruits, and on vegetables

Wash all produce thoroughly. Peel the skin from fruits and vegetables or buy organic produce if you are able.



Cleaning supplies: Anything labeled “toxic” or any products with a warning on the label

Try natural products, use baking soda, use vinegar and water to clean.



Smoking, drinking, second-hand smoke

Talk to your health care provider about ways to stop. Do not go to places where people smoke.

Are There Other Dangers for My Baby and Me?

Smoking and drinking alcohol are very dangerous for you and your baby. If you currently smoke or drink, your health care provider can talk with you about ways to stop. The smoke from other people’s cigarettes or other tobacco products, second-hand smoke, is also very dangerous for both you and your baby. You should avoid any places where people smoke (bars, restaurants), and do not smoke or allow other people to smoke in your home.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

March of Dimes: <http://www.marchofdimes.com/>

Environmental Protection Agency:

About Mercury

<http://www.epa.gov/mercury/index.htm>

Lead in your Home: A Parent’s Reference Guide

<http://www.epa.gov/lead/leadrev.pdf>

Environment, Health, and Safety Online: <http://www.ehso.com/ehshome/pregnancy.htm>

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