

Toxic Matters

Protecting Our Families from
Toxic Substances



Program on Reproductive
Health and the Environment

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

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From Advancing Science to Ensuring Prevention (FASTEP)

FASTEP is an alliance of academic, governmental 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.

Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC



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Toxic substances are chemicals and metals that can harm your health. Everyone is exposed to toxic substances every day. This brochure can help you prevent or reduce your exposure to these substances. This way you can protect your health and your family's health.

Exposure to toxic substances can harm the reproductive systems of women and men and make it harder to get pregnant. Developing fetuses, infants, children, pre-teens and teenagers are especially vulnerable. Being exposed to even small amounts of toxic substances during important times of development can lead to disease early in life, later in life, or even across generations.

To Learn More

This brochure lists some of the many ways to prevent exposure to substances that can harm reproductive health and development. The prevention measures described here are based on recommendations by leading authorities on environmental and occupational health.

Find links to those sources and to many more tips for avoiding exposure to toxic substances at:
www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#authorities.

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Make The Government Work For You

Individual actions help but can only go so far in preventing exposure to toxic substances in the environment. In order to really solve this problem, we need public policies that stop chemical pollution in the first place.



You can influence public policy.

- Become informed about pollution.
- Get involved with groups 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.



Some toxic substances build up in our bodies. This build-up can affect our health and future pregnancies long after we have been exposed. This is why the recommendations here are designed for women, men and children. They apply to all of us, whether or not we have children, are pregnant or want to have children in the future.

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

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Prevent Exposure At Home



Don't smoke.

- Talk to your doctor if you need help quitting.
- Don't let people smoke around you and stay away from public places where people are smoking.



Use non-toxic personal care products.

Many of these products have ingredients that can harm reproductive health.

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

Become A Smart Consumer



Use non-toxic products

Many of the products you use everyday may contain toxic substances. Some consumer guides can help you find non-toxic products. Find links to some of these guides at:
www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#consumerguide.



Prevent Exposure In Your Community

You can also help reduce pollution in your community.



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, especially furniture, tires and plastics.
- Don't use pesticides. Use organic or integrated pest management techniques in lawns and gardens. Learn more at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#community.
- Never throw toxic substances down drains or toilets or in the garbage. Examples of toxic substances include car oil, gasoline, pesticides, paints, solvents and medicines. Contact your local health department to find out how to safely dispose of those substances. Check the government section of your phone book or call the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at 800-232-4636.



Don't spray bugs.

Pesticides are toxic chemicals for killing insects, rodents, weeds, bacteria and mold.

- Keep insects and rodents out of your home. Clean up crumbs and spills. Store food in tightly closed containers. Seal cracks around doors, window sills, and baseboards. Repair drips and holes. Get rid of standing water.
- Use baits and traps instead of sprays, dusts and bombs.
- Don't use chemical tick-and-flea collars, flea baths, or flea dips.
- Hire only licensed pest exterminators.
- Find pesticide-free alternatives at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#pestcontrol.



Get out your mop.

Toxic substances like lead, pesticides and flame retardants are present in dust. Sweeping or dusting with a dry cloth can spread the dust into the air instead of removing it.

- Use a wet mop or wet cloth to clean floors and surfaces.



Take off your shoes.

Shoes can carry toxic chemicals into your home.

- Wipe shoes on a sturdy doormat if you want to keep them on.



Clean your home with non-toxic products.

- It is easy and cheap to make effective, non-toxic cleaners. You can use 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.





Don't dry-clean your clothes.

Most dry-cleaning systems use a chemical called perchloroethylene (PERC). Dry-cleaned clothes release PERC, polluting the air in your home.

- Use water instead. Most clothes labeled “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 like vinyl chloride, phthalates and bisphenol A (BPA).

- Don't buy products made with soft PVC. For example, some shower curtains and toys are made with soft PVC.
- Don't use plastic containers for hot food or drinks. Use 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.

- If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy and are exposed to toxic substances at work, request a change in your duties. Talk to your doctor or your union for guidance. You can find more information about pregnancy and work at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/workmatters.html#pregnancy.
- If you live with anybody who works with toxic chemicals, that person should change and shower after work. The person should also keep work tools and clothing away from other people and living areas in the home. Work clothes should be washed separately.
- Get more information or 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 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 At Work

Many substances used on the job, in office buildings, or in workplace renovation projects are toxic to reproductive health.



By law, you have a 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 workplace hazards, including access to handouts about toxic substances called Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).
- Follow guidelines to avoid exposure. Use protective gear. Ask your employer about substitutes for toxic substances and other ways to prevent harmful exposures.



Choose safer home improvements.

Many paints, glues and flooring materials can release toxic chemicals long after you complete a project.

- Ask for “VOC-free” and “water-based” materials.
- If you are pregnant, don’t work on or near remodeling projects.
- 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. Fish advisories are warnings about fish. Don’t eat the fish you or others catch before checking these warnings to make sure the fish is safe to eat. Learn more about fish advisories at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#mercury.
- Replace your mercury thermometer with a digital one. Don’t throw your mercury thermometer or any other item containing mercury (such as 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 (CDC) at: 800-232-4636.





Avoid pesticides and other toxic substances in food and water.

- Eat organic food when possible to reduce your exposure to pesticides. If you can't afford to buy organic produce, buy the fruits and vegetables with the lowest pesticide levels and avoid the most contaminated ones. Learn more about reducing your exposure to pesticides from food at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#foodandwater.
- Limit foods with a lot of animal fat. Many toxic substances build up in animal fat.
- Avoid canned foods and beverages as much as you can. Eat fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. This helps you avoid exposure to BPA. BPA is a toxic substance used in the lining of most cans.
- To learn how to reduce toxic substances in your drinking water, go to: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#foodandwater.



Avoid lead exposure.

There may be lead in house paint, dust, and garden 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 at: 800-424-LEAD.
- If you have lead paint in your home, cover it 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.

Radon is a radioactive gas found in many basements and ground floors.

- Purchase a testing kit at your local hardware store. Kits are cheap and easy to use.
- Learn more about radon by calling 1-800-SOS-RADON or at: www.prhe.ucsf.edu/prhe/tmlinks.html#radon.

