

Schools & Playgrounds



Playgrounds, daycare centers and schools: every parent hopes these are safe places, where children can flourish and grow. Unfortunately, pesticides used in and near schools and playgrounds can make children an unintended ‘frontline community,’ exposing them to dangerous chemicals just when [their developing brains and bodies are especially vulnerable](#).

Parents, communities and organizations around the country are finding ways to make schools safer for growing children. Progress includes pesticide use reduction in school buildings, buffer zones to protect children from spraying in nearby fields, and support for safer pest control methods in and near schools and playgrounds.

Contaminated Classrooms & Schoolyards

From the moment the morning school bell rings, children face a number of exposure risks. Pesticides can settle on desks, books, counters and walls. Children – and teachers – breathe contaminated air or touch contaminated surfaces, unknowingly exposing themselves to chemical residues that can remain in the school environment for days.

In rural areas, pesticides often drift into schoolyards from nearby fields. Of the [40 pesticides most commonly used in schools](#), 28 are probable or possible carcinogens, 26 have been shown to cause reproductive effects, 26 damage the nervous system, and 13 can cause birth defects.

In rural areas, pesticides often drift into schoolyards during and after applications on nearby fields. [PAN's Drift Catcher](#) has been used in communities across the country to document pesticides in or near school grounds.

- [Schoolchildren in Strathmore, CA](#) were exposed to pesticides sprayed in a neighboring field, feeling dizzy and falling sick in November, 2007.
- Seven children were hospitalized and a total of 11 people sickened in [Kahuku, Hawaii](#) in 2007, when fumes from an organophosphate insecticide drifted over the school from a nearby sod farm.

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- In Florida, high school students used a [PAN Drift Catcher](#) to measure the pesticide endosulfan drifting into the school from nearby cabbage fields.

Pesticides, Playgrounds & Fields



Young children explore the world in very hands-on ways. Pesticides used to coat the wood of playground structures, keep landscaping tidy or fields weed-free can end up on small fingers - which often end up in small mouths. A young child's common hand-to-mouth behavior is well known to increase risk of pesticide exposure.

Communities across the country are confronting this risk to young children head-on, demanding safer play environments. In the [Pacific Northwest](#), 17 cities have mandated pesticide free parks and playgrounds.

Pesticide use on playing fields has raised concerns among families and environmental health advocates nationwide. The [National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns](#) notes that “the common, everyday practices used to maintain our children's playing fields are unintentionally and unnecessarily exposing them to carcinogens, asthmagens, and developmental toxins,” and [calls for a shift to organic turf management](#) on playing fields across the country.

Communities are demanding safer play environments for children

Calls for Synthetic turf, touted by advocates as a “solution” to pesticides on playing fields, has actually raised other [serious health concerns](#). The U.S. currently has about 3,500 synthetic playing fields made of various materials, including nylon and polyethylene, and about 800 are installed each year at schools, colleges, parks and stadiums, according to the industry's Synthetic Turf Council.

Pigment containing lead chromate is used in some surfaces to make the turf green and hold its color in sunlight, potentially exposing children and others using this turf to lead. Studies have also raised deep concerns about exposure to lead and other toxins from the crumb rubber infill used in many synthetic turf fields.

Creating Safer Spaces for Children

Thirty-six states now have school pesticide regulations, and pioneering districts across the country are developing least-toxic pest management approaches. A few examples:

- In 2005 [Connecticut became the first U.S. state](#) to ban use of synthetic weed killer pesticides around schools & daycare centers in grades K-8.
- In May 2010, New York Governor David Paterson signed the [Child Safe Playing Fields Act](#) into law, banning the cosmetic use of pesticides on playgrounds & sports fields at schools & daycare centers. The law also applies these protections to high schools.
- In California, the [Healthy Schools Act](#) mandates parent notification when pesticides are to be

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applied, and recommends least-toxic Integrated Pest Management for schools and daycares. Many local school districts have adopted [health-protective policies](#), and several counties have enacted buffer zones, limiting aerial spraying of pesticides around schools, daycares and other sensitive sites. A new [study](#) examines the effectiveness of the Act in daycares.

- Dozens of municipalities in Canada, as well as the provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia, have passed laws restricting “cosmetic” pesticide use for lawns & playgrounds. Ontario province recently [banned use of 2,4-D](#) in lawns & landscapes.

In 2009 EPA released a plan encouraging all public schools to adopt [Integrated Pest Management by 2015](#). [Experts calculate](#) the approach could reduce school use of pesticides by at least 70%.

Unfortunately, EPA's plan is a set of guidelines rather than a directive, and no funding to help schools switch from conventional pest management. The [Schools Environmental Protection Act](#), introduced in 2009, would address these issues.

PAN works with [partners](#) to support stronger measures across the country to create safer spaces for children as they grow.

Source URL: <http://www.panna.org/issues/frontline-communities/schools-playgrounds>