

More evidence that pesticides impact kids' health

Jan 12, 2011 by Margaret Reeves



We often look to scientific research on the hazards of agricultural chemicals to support our call to protect farmworkers and their families from pesticides—a call that all too frequently goes unheeded. But we don't give up, and I'm delighted to say, neither do the dedicated researchers upon whom we depend. Scientists at UC Berkeley recently released another round of solid data documenting the dramatic impacts pesticides can have on children's health.

For twelve years, Dr. Brenda Eskenazi and her colleagues have worked with community clinics and other organizations in California's Salinas Valley to document how children's health is affected by routine, chronic exposure to pesticides. As the long-term study by the [Center for the Health Assessment of Mothers and Children of Salinas \(CHAMACOS\)](#) shows, kids are exposed to pesticides throughout their childhood—even before they're born. And the resulting health effects are sobering.

In 2000 Eskenazi's team recruited nearly 600 pregnant women into the study to measure levels of several pesticides in their bodies. Once their children were born, they too became study subjects starting with testing for pesticides in cord blood samples immediately after birth. Then the researchers began tracking the children's health over time. They periodically release their findings, and the [latest round of results](#) describe dramatic effects on developing brains and nervous systems.

At age 2, children of mothers who had the highest levels of breakdown products from organophosphate pesticides in their urine had the greatest risk of "pervasive developmental disorder." Symptoms include behavioral effects like being afraid to try new things, inability to tolerate anything out of place, and avoiding looking others in the eye—all signs consistent with autism spectrum behavior. By age 5, children who had been exposed to the most pesticides in the womb were at [greater risk of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#). As the children continue to grow, researchers are now studying whether the greatest prenatal exposures are linked to learning disabilities, behavior problems, asthma, diabetes and obesity.

While the situation is most certainly worse in agricultural communities, children in urban settings may face similar risks. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest that the level of pesticide contamination of kids around the country, regardless of proximity to agriculture, is high enough to raise questions about the impact of those pesticides on their development. This means routine exposures to pesticides from [the food we eat may not be as safe as we are led to believe](#).

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PAN's "[What's on my Food](#)" website and iPhone app can help identify those fruits and vegetables with the highest risk of carrying pesticide residues, and identifies what health effects are associated with the residues found.

Please join us by using your food dollars—and your political power—to advocate for greater production and availability of organic, pesticide-free foods for all.

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