

## **This brain-harming pesticide has got to go**

Aug 21, 2013 by Medha Chandra



It's back to school time, and as a parent I am trying to make sure my kids have what they need to succeed in class. But there are things I can't protect them from, like pesticides kids across the U.S. are exposed to in their food, air and water — some of which may be impeding their ability to learn.

Brain-harming pesticides like [chlorpyrifos](#) continue to be used in agriculture even though well-regarded [scientific studies](#) show that this chemical can harm kids' intelligence and lead to several neurodevelopmental delays. As a mom, and someone who follows the science on pesticides, the fact that chlorpyrifos is still commonly used makes me furious.

The Centers for Disease Control's studies of chemicals found in people's bodies reveals breakdown products of organophosphate pesticides, including chlorpyrifos, [in more than 90%](#) of those sampled. The highest levels are frequently found in children, sometimes above the "levels of concern" defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

While EPA moves at a snail's pace, children everywhere continue to be exposed to chlorpyrifos residues in their food, air and water.

It's time for EPA to speed up its re-evaluation of chlorpyrifos' harms to humans. PAN and partners are [calling on Congress](#) to press EPA to act faster. We need to protect our kids from chlorpyrifos and other organophosphate pesticides that harm their brainpower.

### **EPA, time to hustle!**

EPA has been [reviewing chlorpyrifos](#) for a while now, but some of the [steps](#) they have taken to supposedly reduce children's exposure to chlorpyrifos are clearly inadequate. Take, for example, the [buffer zones](#) for chlorpyrifos applications around "sensitive sites" proposed by the agency earlier this year. A buffer zone of ten feet? That's just laughable. PAN senior scientist Margaret Reeves agrees:

"These proposed buffer zones are sorely inadequate. Regulations in Tulare County, CA, for example, require quarter mile buffers for aerial applications near schools of highly hazardous pesticides such as chlorpyrifos. You need buffers of at least that size to begin to offer some kind of protection to kids from such drift-prone pesticides"

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Published on Pesticide Action Network (<http://www.panna.org>)

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residues in their food — and also in the air and water in rural, agricultural areas.

As pointed out in a [previous blog](#), apples and peaches, among other foods that we pack into our kids' lunch boxes should not be setting them up for exposure to chlorpyrifos residues — and potentially harming their intelligence. Chlorpyrifos exposure has been linked to ADHD and lower IQs, among other health impacts. And in the U.S., several [safer alternatives](#) already exist for many of the crops currently reliant on this neurotoxic pesticide.

### Schools take action

Recognizing the dangers from pesticides to kids' health and intellect, many school districts across the country have been [taking steps](#) to limit or reduce children's [pesticide exposure](#) in school buildings and on playgrounds and fields. Several schools are also sourcing foods grown without pesticides for their lunch programs.

Whether large districts like Los Angeles Unified School District (with over 1,000 sites), or smaller districts like Placer Hills Union School district (with only 2 schools), some California schools are implementing [Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\)](#) practices instead of relying on high-risk pesticides. IPM application methods have proven to be effective at holding pests at bay while keeping costs steady or even lowering them.

Other California school districts are protecting kids from potentially brain-harming pesticides by providing nutritious, safe, often pesticide-free food. For example, in addition to eliminating all processed food and high fructose corn syrup (among other things), the [Berkeley Unified School District](#) serves local, organic milk at lunch and organic fruits and vegetables as much as possible. [Palo Alto Unified School District](#) also has organic food options available in schools. Schools in other states also serve organic produce in their school salad bars.

But despite all these progressive steps taken by schools and families, we cannot let EPA off the hook. It has a duty to protect children from being regularly exposed to neurotoxic pesticides, whether as residue on food or in the air and water in rural communities. As a parent I say to the EPA: Stop wasting time and take some serious, meaningful steps to protect kids across the country!

[Take action »](#) It's time for EPA to take action and protect our kids' brain health. Join us in [calling on Congress](#) to spur the agency to act!

**Source URL:** <http://www.panna.org/blog/harming-kids-brains>