Let’s make protecting kids from pesticides a national priority.

One conversation at a time.

Children today are sicker than they were a generation ago, and pesticides are a part of the reason why. From childhood cancers to birth defects and asthma, a wide range of childhood diseases and disorders are on the rise, and public health experts tell us we have a “silent pandemic” of learning disabilities and disorders. But we can break the silence by starting conversations in our communities about the importance of protecting kids from the harms of pesticide exposure.

Pesticide Action Network has just released A Generation in Jeopardy, a report reviewing dozens of recent scientific studies on the impacts of pesticides on children’s health. In this guide we have pulled out key facts and talking points to enable non-experts to initiate evidence-based and solutions-oriented conversations.

Here are some facts and findings to get you started...

A growing body of evidence points to pesticide exposure as a significant contributor to childhood health harms. Over the last five years in particular, the link between low-level environmental chemical exposures and a range of disorders and diseases from cancer to obesity has strengthened.

Evidence of pesticides harming the brain and nervous system, and links to certain childhood cancers, is particularly strong. Pesticide exposure also contributes to rising rates of birth defects and early puberty.

- National Cancer Institute data show that overall, incidence of childhood cancer is up 25% since 1975. Leukemia and childhood brain tumors have risen even more over this period — 40% and 50%, respectively. More than 10,000 children are diagnosed with cancer each year.

- Several 2011 studies found that a mother’s exposure to organophosphate pesticides during pregnancy is linked to lower IQ and weaker working memory for her child.

- Researchers at the University of Montreal and Harvard report that children who have higher levels of pesticide breakdown products in their urine — at levels commonly found in children from food residues — are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD.

Emerging science indicates that pesticides may be important contributors to the current epidemic of childhood asthma, obesity and diabetes.

- More than 7 million U.S. children are now affected by asthma, up from an estimated 2 million in 1980. And in a study of more than 4,000 children from 12 communities in Southern California, researchers found that exposure to pesticides in the first year of life significantly increased the risk of being diagnosed with asthma by age five.

Scientists tell us that we have a “silent pandemic” of learning disabilities and disorders.

- 400,000 to 600,000 of the 4 million U.S. children born each year are affected by some kind of developmental disability — a 17% rise in the past 15 years. Many recent studies link exposure to pesticides — even at very low levels — with increased risk of ADHD, autism and drops in IQ levels.

Scientists have long known that children are particularly susceptible to environmental health harms.

- Quickly growing bodies take in more of everything. Relative to their size, kids eat, breathe and drink much more than adults. An infant takes in about 15 times more water than an adult per pound of body weight, and up to age 12, a child inhales roughly twice as much air.

Timing of exposure is critically important. If a child or fetus is exposed to even very small amounts of a harmful pesticide during a particular moment of development, the impacts can be severe and are often irreversible.

- Using MRI technology, researchers at Columbia University found changes in the brain structure of infants who had been exposed to the insecticide chlorpyrifos in the womb. Areas of the brain related to attention, language, emotions and control were all affected.

**Practical policy interventions:**

It’s time to make a solid start for our children a national priority. While individual household choices can help, protecting kids from the health harms of pesticides requires real policy change.

The best way to protect children from the harms of pesticides is to dramatically reduce use nationwide. This would not only limit children’s exposure, it would also lower pesticide levels in the bodies of men and women of childbearing age — protecting current and future generations in one fell swoop. Those pesticides most harmful to children should be first on the list.

The following key policy changes are needed to protect our children’s health:

- Create stronger policy tools so enforcement agencies can take swift action to pull existing pesticides off the market and block new pesticides when independent studies suggest they are harmful to children.
- Withdraw harmful pesticide products from use in homes, daycare centers and schools.
- Establish pesticide-free zones around schools, daycare centers and neighborhoods in agricultural areas to protect children from harmful exposures.
- Increase investment and support for innovative farmers who are stepping off the pesticide treadmill.
- Set and track national pesticide use reduction goals, focusing first on those pesticides that studies show are harmful to children.

Visit [www.panna.org/kids](http://www.panna.org/kids) to learn more about how pesticides are harming children’s health, what communities across the country are doing to create pesticide-free schools, parks and playgrounds, and how you can help build momentum toward making a solid start for our children a national priority.