

Environmental Baby Care

It is easy to get overwhelmed by all of the demands of parenting. However, it is important to make an informed choice about what we put into our children's bodies. Unfortunately, there are many toxic exposures in everyday items. We can protect our babies and children by staying educated, leaving out ingredients we don't recognize, and doing the best that we can.

Five steps you can take:

1. Read labels when shopping
2. Ventilate – open windows!
3. Use green cleaning supplies
4. Renovate right
5. Keep pesticides out

Plastics: In general, try to avoid plastics as much as possible. Plastics are linked to higher asthma rates in adults and children, and they contain the carcinogenic materials phthalates and bisphenol A. Never microwave in plastic or wash plastic in dishwashers (the high heat degrades them).

Feeding: Use glass bottles (Evenflo, small and large) to avoid bisphenol A in plastic (BPA is carcinogenic and banned in European and Israeli baby's bottles). For travel, bisphenol free plastic bottles and sippy cups are available by Medela and Born Free. Safe sippy cups can also be made of stainless steel such as Klean Kanteen.

Replace rubber nipples with silicone (Rubber can sometimes leach chemicals over time)

Preferably freeze milk in glass bottles so as not to reheat in soft plastic bags
Silicone pacifiers are preferable to rubber ones.

Instead of plastic bowls and cutlery, chose inert substances such as wood or stainless steel.

Food: BPA also contaminates many canned goods because it is used as a plastic liner on the can. One in three cans of infant formula tested had a single serving with enough BPA to expose a woman or infant to BPA levels more than 200 times the government's traditional safe level. Use breastmilk or formula that is powdered or comes in glass. Once you introduce solid foods, try to avoid pesticides as much as possible. The highest pesticide foods (worth getting organic!) include meat, dairy, eggs and Apples, Celery, Cherries, Grapes, Grapefruit, Lettuce, Nectarines, Oranges, Peaches, Pears, Peppers, Potatoes, Raspberries, Snow peas, Spinach, and Strawberries.

Clothing: Most children's clothing is sprayed with flame retardants (BBDE's) that interfere with thyroid function and are carcinogenic. Wash new clothing multiple times or get second hand kids clothes. Wash all stuffed animals and blankets

multiple times before using. Certain brands now carry retardant-free lines (eg. Carters).

Diaper Care: Baby wipes by Whole Foods or Seventh Generation are ideal since many mainstream baby wipes contain parabens (which are linked to breast cancer) or artificial fragrances that can be irritating. You can also use cut up receiving blankets with warm water if you have a diaper service or don't mind washing the wipes.

Good diaper creams include Weleda Calendula cream and Burt's Bees. Many other creams contain parabens.

Summer: Suntan lotion is not advisable for children under the age of two. Consider a UV sunscreen netting for over the stroller (also keeps out bugs), UV protection hat and long sleeve UV sunwear (available at Target, online etc). Make sure that any sunscreen used is labeled "paraben free". A database with the health rating of sunscreens is available at www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/special/sunscreens/summary.php. Surprisingly, 84% of 783 sunscreen products offer inadequate protection from the sun or contain ingredients with significant safety concerns. The best rated sunscreens included Badger's SPF 30, Lavera Sun Screen Neutral SPF 40, UV Natural UV Natural Baby SPF 30+, Peter Thomas Roth Titanium Dioxide Sunblock (SPF 30), Mustela Bebe High Protection Sun Lotion, SPF 50 and Jason Natural Cosmetics sunbrellas SPF 30+ Mineral Based physical sunblock.

Do not expose a child under 4 yrs old to DEET in commercial bug repellants – it is highly neurotoxic. Instead, use essential oil bug repellants available from your health food store.

Winter: A "Bundle Me" or similar liner for your infant car seat is advisable to stay warm. If buying new, wash a few times to eliminate flame retardants.

Car seat: Install your infant car seat and have inspected by your local police or car dealership. Please do this well in advance of your due date since you don't want to be caught off guard and will potentially need it to drive home from the hospital if you have a hospital birth. Car seats have been identified as a considerable source of indoor air pollution, with the average American child spending 1.5 hrs daily in a car seat. www.healthycar.org studied the overall toxicity of 60 major car seat brands sold at Babies R Us and Target. They measured bromine, chlorine, lead, antimony, arsenic, chromium, cobalt, copper, nickel, mercury and tin in the car seats. You can search overall rating by brand and model at www.healthycar.org. Best options for boosters are Evenflo Big Kid No-Back Gold Dust, Britax Parkway Express, for Convertibles are Eddie Bauer 3 in 1 Convertible Montecito, Cosco Scenara 5-Point and for infant car seats are Evenflo Discovery Infant Churchill, Graco SnugRide Emerson.

Stroller: Many versions and everyone prefers something different. For travel, the Universal Infant car seat Carrier (Kolkroft) or Graco's car seat carrier are lightweight.

Carriers: Lots to choose from. When babies can't hold their head up, slings, the Maya wrap and Baby Bjorn are good. Once they get heavier, the Ergo carrier is much easier on your back because it puts weight into your hips.

Bed: It is a personal choice whether to have a crib, bassinet, co-sleeper or family bed. If using a new infant mattress, air outside first to allow it to off gas flame retardants. Cover infant mattresses with a mattress wrap to prevent SIDS. BabeSafe covers can be ordered at <http://www.preventcribdeath.com/site/452285/page/45029>.

Toys: Aim for cloth and wood whenever possible to minimize plastics. Especially avoid #3 or #7 plastics. Anything smaller than the circumference of a toilet paper roll is a potential choking hazard.

Cleaners: Since your baby will be gumming things and crawling on floors, they ingest a fair amount of cleaning products given their body weight. Use only green cleaning products (nothing with a poison sign on it). Good brands include Seventh Generation, Nature Clean, Ecover, Shaklee, Melaleuca, GTC, Soap Factory AA5 Concentrate, Arm & Hammer Washing Soda, ECOgent.

Lawn Pesticides: Homes that spray their lawns with pesticides have 11 times the childhood leukemia rates and 4 times the asthma rates than homes that do not spray. Organic lawn care is available from A1 Organics in Southeast Michigan 248-889-7200. Note that it is common practice for mainstream companies to advertise "organic" or "green" care options where they use an organic fertilizer but still use pesticides and pre-emergent poisons. Don't be deceived! For how to question providers see <http://www.beyondpesticides.org/lawn/factsheets/faq.htm> Do it yourself with some easy lawn tips. <http://www.toxicsinfo.org/Lawn/HealthyBeautifulLawn.htm>

First Aid Kit: Bulb syringe, baby thermometer, nail clippers, Hyland's Teething Combo or Boiron's Chamomilla Teething Liquid, Hyland's Colic Combo or Ear Infection if needed, Hyland's Calm Forte for Kids.

Bath A hidden cancer-causing petrochemical, 1,4-Dioxane, has been found in dozens of children's bath products such as Hello Kitty Bubble Bath, Huggies Baby Wash, Johnson's Baby Wash, Scooby-Doo Bubble Bath and Sesame Street Bubble Bath. Please read labels carefully and use all natural products. For a safe list or to look up a brand's safety rating, see <http://www.ewg.org/reports/skindeep>. Consider using Dr. Bronners or any 100% castille soap.

In the garden: Play sand can contain asbestos if its from quarry rock (eg. Premium Play Sand, Kiddies Fun Sand) or silica if too finely ground. Get washed beach or river sand. Avoid or care for pressure treated wood in porches/gardens to minimize arsenic exposure An inexpensive test kit can be ordered at <http://www.ewg.org/reports/poisonwoodrivals/orderform.php>
Best (but most costly) option is to replace arsenic-treated wood structures with safer alternatives cedar, paver stone, concrete or recycled plastic composite). Wash your hands and your children's hands after every exposure to arsenic-treated wood, especially before eating. Do not store toys or tools under the deck. Arsenic leaches from the wood when it rains and may coat things left there. Do not use commercial "deck washing" solutions. These solutions can convert chemicals on the wood to a more toxic form.

Art Supplies: Avoid powders and dusts, such as powdered clay, tempera or instant paper mache, model glue or other epoxies or solvents, permanent markers and aerosol spray paints. Instead use Pre-mixed talc-free clay, or homemade salt clay, liquid paints or paints pre-mixed by an adult, papier mache from newspaper and flour-and-water paste, water-based white glue or library paste, water-based markers (easier clean-up too!).

YES, this is very scary information. But we CAN protect our children. And whenever you can, please speak out on behalf of children's health.

Environmental home and office consultations are available through Melissa Cooper Vachon 248-545-4852.

Web resources:

www.healthychild.org

www.environmentalcalifornia.org

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West Bloomfield 248-737-7126
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