



Eco-Healthy Child Care®



Eco-Healthy Child Care® helps early childhood learning environments to be as healthy, safe and green as possible by reducing children's exposure to toxic chemicals.

Plastics & Plastic Toys

Health Concerns

Certain plastics are known to contain toxic chemicals which have negative impacts on human health. Children are particularly vulnerable to toxic chemicals since their systems and organs are still developing. Young children are also at greater risk since they often insert plastic objects into their mouths. Baby bottles, sippy cups, teething rings, and toys are often made with phthalates and Bisphenol A (BPA). These two toxic ingredients in plastics are of particular concern, as research increasingly shows that these chemicals mimic or suppress hormones (e.g., estrogen and testosterone) and disrupt normal development and growth.

Phthalates (pronounced THAL-ates)

Phthalates are a class of chemicals that are used to soften plastics, such as PVC (Polyvinyl Chloride), bind fragrances in products, and act as solvents and fixatives. Human exposure occurs through:

Inhalation- breathing in fragrances, or fumes from solvents and fixatives

Ingestion- chewing on a plastic toy creates small openings in the plastic, providing an avenue for leaching of chemicals from the toy into a child's mouth

Absorption- lotion, perfumes, deodorants

Adverse health effects include hormone disruption, developmental and reproductive problems,

asthma, preterm birth, low sperm count, undescended testes, premature puberty, and development of some cancers.

Bisphenol A (BPA)

Bisphenol A is a hormone disrupter that is used to make polycarbonate plastic (hard clear plastic). Bisphenol A can be found in baby bottles, water bottles, canned food liners, and sippy cups. Human exposure occurs primarily through ingestion: diet, sucking/mouthing plastics, and dermal contact.

Adverse health effects include prostate cancer, breast cancer, miscarriages, birth defects, early puberty, low sperm count, hyperactivity and aggressiveness. Traces of BPA can be found in more than 90% of the U.S. population.

Avoid Plastics with Recycling Codes: #3, #6, and #7

#3 – Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)

PVC (soft vinyl plastic) often contains lead and phthalates, and the production of PVC releases cancer-causing dioxins into the environment.

Products: Flexible plastic toys (rubber duckies, dolls, beach balls, infant bath books), bibs, rest mats, inflatable swimming pools, garden hoses, raincoats, wall paneling and flooring, cosmetics, shower curtains, crib bumpers, imitation leather, and food packaging.

Health Concerns: Cancer, birth defects, reproductive and developmental disorders, low sperm

count, undescended testes, premature puberty, and liver dysfunction.

#6 – Polystyrene (PS, commonly known as Styrofoam)

Toxic styrene can leach from polystyrene plastic.

Products: Coffee cups, carry-out containers, packaging “peanuts”, food trays, disposable cutlery, toys, and packaging for meats, cheeses, and fish.

Health Concerns: Suspected carcinogen and neurotoxin.

#7 – Other (usually polycarbonate)

Bisphenol A (BPA) can leach from polycarbonate plastic and act as a hormone disrupter.

Products: Hard, clear baby bottles, water bottles, and sippy cups; canned food liners.

Health Concerns: Prostate cancer, breast cancer, miscarriages, birth defects, premature puberty, low sperm count, hyperactivity, and aggressiveness.

Eight Tips for Safer Use of Plastics:

1. **Avoid plastics with recycling code #3, #6, and #7.**
2. **Purchase baby bottles and sippy cups labeled “BPA free” or glass options.**
3. **Never heat or microwave food or drink in any plastic containers,** as leaching of toxic chemicals from plastic to food or liquid may occur. Use a paper towel instead of plastic wrap to cover food in the microwave.
4. **Use PVC-free plastic wrap** (buy plastic wrap and bags made with polyethylene).
5. **Minimize the use of canned foods and canned drinks** as many are lined with BPA.
6. **Choose phthalate-free toys.** Look for toys labeled “phthalate-free” or “PVC-free”. Choose toys made from polypropylene or polyethylene.
7. **Purchase phthalate-free beauty products.**
8. **Ask your dentist for BPA-free sealants and composite fillings.**
9. **Discard all plastic food containers with scratches,** especially baby bottles, sippy cups and infant feeding plates and cups.

Plastic Resources

- Plastic Containers

<http://www.thegreenguide.com/buying-guide/plastic-containers>

- Smart Plastics Guide for Parents and Children

www.healthobservatory.org/library.cfm?refid=77083

- Adverse Health Effects of Plastics

www.ecologycenter.org/factsheets/plastichealtheffects.html

- Styrene

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tf.asp?id=420&tid=74>

- Plastics that May be Harmful to Children and Reproductive Health

www.ehhi.org/reports/plastics/ehhi_plastics_report_2008.pdf

- BPA

www.hhs.gov/safety/bpa/

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call: 202-543-4033, ext. 13

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Visit: www.cehn.org/ehcc

A recipient of EPA’s Children’s Environmental Health Excellence Award in 2006, Eco-Healthy Child Care® (EHCC) is a national program that seeks to improve the environmental health of children by partnering with child care professionals to eliminate or reduce environmental health hazards found in child care facilities. Originally created by the Oregon Environmental Council in 2005, EHCC is now managed by Children’s Environmental Health Network.

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