

Your Child and the Environment

Guidelines for Parents Part III Where Children Learn and Play



Where children learn and play

Sun

Warm, sunny days are wonderful. But what may seem harmless can be very bad for you and your child. The sun is the main cause of skin cancer, the most common form of cancer in the United States. A child's skin is very delicate and can burn easily. Sunburns can be very painful and can cause a child to become sick. The sun's rays can also cause damage to the eyes.

What You Can Do

- Keep babies under 6 months of age out of direct sunlight.
- Choose a sunscreen made for children with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15.
- Use hats and sunglasses to protect your child's head and eyes from the sun.
- Encourage the use of shaded areas for your child's outdoor activities between 10 am and 4 pm when the sun's rays are strongest.
- Dress your child in lightweight clothing that covers as much of the body as possible and practical.

Outdoor air pollution

There are a number of things in the air that can be harmful to children. One serious type of air pollution is ozone. Ozone is a colorless gas that is harmful when near the ground. Ozone levels are highest in summer, in the late afternoon. It may be particularly hazardous to children because they spend so much time running and playing outdoors. Ozone pollution can cause breathing problems in children with asthma.

What You Can Do

- Restrict your child's outdoor activities when health advisories or smog alerts have been issued.
- Whenever possible, take public transportation, carpool, walk, or ride a bike instead of driving. This will help reduce the amount of air pollution caused by cars.

Insect repellent

Outdoor activities are a great way for children to have fun and exercise. But these types of activities often include insects. Be careful about the insect repellents you use on your child. Most insect repellents include a chemical called DEET (diethyltoluamide). This chemical is absorbed into the skin and can be harmful to children.

What You Can Do

- Choose an insect repellent that is made for children.
- Be sure any insect repellent used on your child contains a low level DEET (no more than 10%).
- Apply insect repellent to clothing when possible, rather than directly on the skin.

Lawn and garden fertilizers

Some common lawn and garden fertilizers can be harmful if children come in contact with them while playing in the yard. Many of these products are made with chemicals (pesticides) that are known to cause health problems, especially in children.

What You Can Do

- Use these chemicals only when needed.
- Read and follow the instructions carefully.
- Do not let your child play on a treated lawn until it has been watered twice and the odor of the pesticides has gone away.

Art supplies

Arts and crafts projects are a fun way for children to learn. However, some art supplies can cause health problems in children who use them. While older children can usually use these products safely, most younger children and some children with disabilities cannot. Harmful art supplies can include:

- rubber cement
- permanent felt-tip markers
- pottery glazes
- enamels
- spray fixatives
- prepackaged papier mâché

What You Can Do

- Use only "nontoxic" art supplies.
- Read and follow all instructions carefully.
- Always use products in a well-ventilated room.
- Look for the ACMI "nontoxic" seal or other information on the label that says the product is safe for children.
- Talk to your school to make sure only safe art supplies are being used.

Whether it is inside or outside, children love to explore their environment. This natural curiosity is an important way for children to learn. Be aware of the possible hazards that your child may face. Keep in mind that not all environmental hazards can be avoided completely and do what you can to reduce your child's exposure.

Electric and magnetic fields—another environmental hazard?

All electric appliances like microwave ovens, computers, and TV's produce electric and magnetic fields (EMF's) when they are used. There is some concern that exposure to these fields may cause health problems, including cancer. However, research is still being done and a definite link between cancer and EMF's has not been made. Until more is known about EMF's, you can reduce your child's exposure by:

- keeping your child away from microwaves while they are in use
- having your child sit at least 3 feet from the TV screen
- moving electrical clocks, radios, and baby monitors away from your child's bed
- not using electric bedding (blankets, mattress pads, heating pads, and waterbed heaters)

To learn more

Environmental Protection Agency Public Information Center
Room 311 West Towers, Mail Code 3406
401 M Street, SW
Washington, DC 20460
202/260-7751

Food and Drug Administration Consumer Affairs
Room 16-75, Mail Code HFE88
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857
800/532-4440

National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides
701 E Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003
202/543-5450

American Lung Association
1740 Broadway
New York, NY 10019-4374
800/LUNG-USA

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
Public Information Office
1600 Clifton Road, NE
Atlanta, GA 30333
404/639-0501

Pesticide Hotline
800/858-7378

EMF Hotline
800/363-2383

Safe Drinking Water Hotline
800/426-4791

Lead Hotline
800/LEAD-FYI

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

American Academy
of Pediatrics



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