

Children polluted with chemicals: report



CTV.ca News Staff

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Flame retardants, mercury and lead were just some of the toxic chemicals found in the bodies of children and their parents in a cross-Canada study of pollution in people.

"It makes me angry," Amy Robertson, a volunteer in the study, told CTV News. "I feel victimized by the air that I am breathing and the things I have no control over."

The report by Environmental Defence, entitled *Polluted Children, Toxic Nation: A Report on Pollution in Canadian Families*, tested the blood and urine of 13 people from communities across Canada.

Seven children and six adults from British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick were checked for 68 different toxins.

The lab tests found a total of 46 of the 68 chemicals in the volunteers, including toxins that can cause cancer, reproductive disorders, disrupt the hormone system and cause developmental delays.

On average, adults had 32 toxins, and 23 were found in children.

"Most shocking, in a number of cases, children had much higher levels of certain toxic chemicals than their parents," said Dr. Rick Smith, executive director of Environmental Defence.

"In fact, in every case, the children tested had at least one toxin at a higher level than the adults that we tested," he told a news conference.

Viviane Maraphi, a mother and Toxic Nations volunteer from Montreal, had the highest level of toxins -- 36.

Her 10-year-old son, Aladin Bonin, had 25 chemicals in his body.

"When I saw how many different chemicals are in my body, I was astounded. But, when I saw the toxic chemicals in my son's body, I was angry. Our children deserve better protection," she said in a news release.

"It's not fair that children should be so polluted with these chemicals," said Aladin. "I hope that adults do something now to fix the problem."

One child gets her blood tested in the study.



Amy Robertson says 'It makes me angry.'



Rick Smith, executive director of Environmental Defence, speaks during a press conference at the National Press Theatre in Ottawa on Thursday.

Toxic politics

In an attempt to bring federal attention to the issue, the environmental group challenged Environment Minister Rona Ambrose to test her own blood and urine for toxic contamination.

Ambrose accepted the request.

"The minister of health and myself have offered to participate in this study to raise the profile of the toxins that are in our children's blood in Canada," Ambrose said during Thursday's question period.

NDP Leader Jack Layton responded by attacking the Conservatives for voting against an NDP bill that would have banned toxic pesticides two weeks ago.

"Actions speak louder than words," Layton said.

Health Canada responded to the study's findings by promising to conduct a much larger national survey.

The federal health agency plans to monitor 5,000 Canadians for toxic contamination over a two-year period from 2007 to 2009.

"The government of Canada takes very seriously the exposure of Canadians to environmental chemicals," said Health Canada spokeswoman Carolyn Sexauer.

According to Sexauer, children are at greater risk for toxic contamination than adults because of their size, immature organs, physiology, curiosity and lack of knowledge.

Room for improvement

Dr. Kapil Khatter, head of Canadian Physicians for the Environment, also volunteered for the study. He said Canada isn't working hard enough to get rid of these chemicals.

"I think we are being lazy, and that we need to make a solid effort to get these chemicals out of our system," Khatter told CTV Newsnet.

"There isn't any reason for us to be walking around with levels of chemicals in our bodies."

Even some banned chemicals -- such as PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and DDT, a pesticide -- were found in the blood and urine of the children.

The Health Canada website says everyone is exposed to trace amounts of PCBs "through food, and to a lesser extent, through air, soil and water."

"These low levels are unlikely to cause adverse health effects," says the info sheet on PCBs.

Based on their findings, Environmental Defence is demanding that the federal government establish guidelines for the elimination of toxic chemicals, starting with some of the most harmful ones, such as flame retardants.

It also wants Ottawa to regulate chemicals in consumer products and reduce pollution in the Great Lakes basin.

"Our children are being poisoned every day by toxic chemicals that surround them at home, school and play," Smith said in a news release.

"The fact that children in our study have higher levels than their parents of a number of chemicals is an indictment of federal inaction and shows the failure of federal environmental law."

With files from CTV's Avis Favaro and The Canadian Press