

Exposure assessment for pregnant women

Topics and Questions	Advice
General	
What do you do for work?	Always wear any recommended personal protective equipment for your type of work.
Are you exposed to any of the following at work:	Some work exposures, especially to metals, solvents, and radiation may be harmful. Contact an Occupational and Environmental physician with questions about workplace exposures. www.aoec.org
Metals or chemicals?	
Solvents or fumes?	
Radiation?	
Lead can cause brain damage, especially in babies and children.	Eating foods enriched with iron (red meats, chicken), calcium (dairy, green leafy vegetables), and vitamin C (oranges, tomatoes, green peppers) decrease the risk from lead.
Have you or anyone living in your house ever been treated for lead poisoning?	Family members should have their lead levels tested.
Do you live in a house built before 1978?	Have your home tested for lead if it was built before 1978. Chipping paint may release lead into the house.
Are there any plans to remodel your home?	Avoid remodeling or hire a certified contractor. Call 1-800-424-LEAD for more information.
Have you ever lived outside the United States?	Refugees or immigrants from resource-poor areas are more likely to have elevated lead levels.
Does your family use imported pottery for cooking, eating, or drinking?	Imported pottery or ceramics may contain lead, which can leach into food.
Have you used any herbal remedies such as azarcon, greta, pay-loo-ah, bo ying?	Do not use lead-containing home remedies.
Have you ever eaten any of the following:	Do not eat clay, soil, dirt, pottery, or paint chips because they may contain high levels of lead.
Clay?	
Soil or dirt?	
Pottery or paint chips?	
Mercury is another metal that can damage the developing fetal brain. Small children are also sensitive.	It's important to clean up mercury spills in a special way. https://www.childrensmarcy.org/Clinics_and_Services/Clinics_and_Departments/Pharmacology_and_Toxicology/Environmental_Health_Specialty_Unit/Cleaning_Up_Liquid_Mercury_S_pills/
Is there a mercury thermometer in your home?	Use a digital or mercury-free thermometer.
In general, do you eat fish more than twice a week?	Eat a variety of fish low in mercury twice a week. Contact local health dept. about local fish advisories.
Do you eat any of the following types of fish:	Do not eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.
Shark or swordfish?	
King Mackerel or tilefish?	
Albacore ("white" tuna)?	Albacore tuna contains more mercury than canned light tuna; do not eat more than 6 oz per week of albacore tuna.

Air pollution is harmful to pregnant women who are “breathing for two” and also for babies, and children.	
Do you plan on having painting done in your home during your pregnancy?	Avoid exposure to paint fumes, wood strippers, and other products containing solvents.
Do you live near an industrial site or busy roadway?	Avoid outdoor exercise on high air pollution days.
Do you use a wood burning stove or kerosene or gas space heaters?	Ensure adequate ventilation of wood burning stoves, fireplaces, and space heaters (crack a window if necessary).
Does anyone who lives in your home or who will be caring for the baby smoke?	Make your home smoke-free. Also, avoid public places where smoking is allowed.
Pesticides have many potential health harms, both for babies and adults.	If you can afford fruits and vegetables grown without pesticides (including organic), you and your family will be exposed to less of these harmful chemicals.
Do you use pesticides (bug killers, weed killers, rat poison) such as Raid, ‘Weed & Feed’ or OFF:	For more information go to the National Pesticide Information website, http://npic.orst.edu/
Inside your home?	Avoid sprays, foggers, and bug bombs.
Outside your home?	Use Integrated Pest Management methods to control pests. http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.homegarden.html
On your pets?	
Healthy food and water are very important during pregnancy and for growing children.	
Do you use water or baby bottles made out of hard plastic or polycarbonate (labelled #7)?	Polycarbonate plastic (even that labeled “BPA-free”) often contains BPA or similar chemicals which can interfere with hormones in the body, especially in developing fetuses.
Do you eat canned foods or food microwaved in plastic?	The linings of food cans may contain a BPA-like additive. Microwaving in plastic increases the leaching of chemicals into food. Microwave in glass containers or ceramic bowls. Use a plate to cover a dish rather than plastic wrap.
Does your water come from a well?	Well water should be rested routinely for contaminants.
If your house is old, does it have lead pipes?	Run the tap for 60 seconds to flush out sitting water.
Chemicals in personal care products, fragrances, and household cleaners may be harmful to pregnant women or fetuses.	These products may contain chemicals such as phthalates which are thought to cause developmental problems for growing fetuses.
Do you use fragrant personal care products such as perfume, body spray, lotion, or shampoo/conditioner?	Use fewer products, and purchase fragrance-free if possible.
Do you use chemicals at home or work for cleaning or scent?	Practice safe handling techniques if you have to use strong chemicals. Try to use less-toxic alternatives for cleaning such as vinegar, soap, and baking soda. Avoid air fresheners and scented candles.

(adapted from the Great Lakes Center for Children’s Environmental Health (Region 5 PEHSU), with permission from Susan Buchanan, MD).