

# Toxic Matters

Protecting Our Families from  
Toxic Substances



To view this brochure online, go to:  
<https://prhe.ucsf.edu>

A Publication of the University of California, San Francisco  
Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment  
From Advancing Science to Ensuring Prevention (FASTEP)

FASTEP is an alliance of academic, governmental and non-governmental partners spanning the fields of reproductive, environmental, occupational and pediatric health and toxicology. Our goal is to secure each and everyone's right to optimal reproductive health by fostering environments that prevent exposure to toxic substances and support healthy pregnancies, children, adults and future generations.

UCSF

Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC



Researched and written by Julieta Pisani McCarthy, MA  
Designed by Arin Fishkin, [www.arinfishkin.com](http://www.arinfishkin.com)  
Editing by Supryia M. Ray, Esq., [www.rayediting.com](http://www.rayediting.com)  
Design Adaptation: Carolina Rojas

Printed on 100% recycled paper, using soy-based ink and wind power in a unionized printing shop.

Updated May 2016





**T**oxic substances are chemicals and elements that can harm your health. Everyone is exposed to toxic substances every day. This brochure can help you prevent or reduce your exposure to these substances. This way you can protect your health and your family's health.

Exposure to toxic substances can harm the reproductive systems of women and men and make it harder to get pregnant. Developing fetuses, infants, children, pre-teens and teenagers are especially vulnerable. Being exposed to even small amounts of toxic substances during important times of development can lead to disease early in life, later in life, or even across generations.

## To Learn More

This brochure lists some of the many ways to prevent exposure to substances that can harm reproductive health and development. The prevention measures described here are based on recommendations by leading authorities on environmental and occupational health.

Find links to those sources and to many more, plus tips for avoiding exposure to toxic substances in the Resources section at: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>

## Contact Us



UCSF Program on Reproductive Health  
and the Environment (PRHE)

550 16th Street, 7th Floor

San Francisco, CA 94143

Phone: (415) 476-3197

<https://prhe.ucsf.edu>



## Make The Government Work For You

Individual actions help but can only go so far in preventing exposure to toxic substances in the environment. In order to really solve this problem, we need public policies that stop chemical pollution in the first place.



### You can influence public policy.

- Become informed about pollution.
- Get involved with groups working to prevent pollution.
- Let your representatives know what you think. You can find contact information for your state and federal representatives at: [www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov)



### Support policies that prevent pollution.

- We need policies that identify existing toxic substances, phase out their use and replace them with alternatives that are safer for human health and the environment.



Some toxic substances build up in our bodies. This build-up can affect our health and future pregnancies long after we have been exposed. This is why the recommendations here are designed for women, men and children. They apply to all of us, whether or not we have children, are pregnant or want to have children in the future.

## 5 Things To Do

Prevent exposure at home  
Prevent exposure at work  
Prevent exposure in your community  
Become a smart consumer  
Make the government work for you

To view this brochure online, go to our website:  
<https://prhe.ucsf.edu>





## Prevent Exposure At Home



### Don't smoke.

- Talk to your doctor if you need help quitting.
- Don't let people smoke around you and stay away from public places where people are smoking.



### Use non-toxic personal care products.

Many products have ingredients that can harm reproductive health.

- For more information and resources, go to our website:  
<https://prhe.ucsf.edu>

## Become A Smart Consumer



### Use non-toxic products

Many of the products you use everyday may contain toxic substances. Some consumer guides can help you find non-toxic products. Find links to some of these guides in the Resources section at:  
<https://prhe.ucsf.edu>





## Prevent Exposure In Your Community



Help create a better environment for your family and everyone around you.

- Drive less. Carpool, take public transportation, ride your bike, or walk.
- Never burn trash, especially furniture, tires and plastics.
- Don't use pesticides. Use organic or integrated pest management techniques in lawns and gardens.
- Never throw toxic substances down drains or toilets or in the garbage. Examples of toxic substances include car oil, gasoline, pesticides, paints, solvents and medicines. Contact your local health department to find out how to safely dispose of those substances.



### Don't spray bugs.

Pesticides are toxic chemicals for killing insects, rodents, weeds, bacteria and mold, but they can also harm your health.

- Keep insects and rodents out of your home. Clean up crumbs and spills. Store food in tightly closed containers. Seal cracks around doors, window sills, and baseboards. Repair drips and holes. Get rid of standing water.
- Use baits and traps instead of sprays, dusts and bombs.
- Don't use chemical tick-and-flea collars, flea baths, or flea dips.
- Hire only licensed pest exterminators.
- For more information and resources, go to our website: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>



### Get out your mop.

Toxic substances like lead, pesticides, and flame retardants are present in dust. Sweeping or dusting with a dry cloth can spread the dust into the air instead of removing it.

- Use a wet mop or wet cloth to clean floors and surfaces.



### Take off your shoes.

Shoes can carry toxic chemicals into your home.

- Wipe shoes on a sturdy doormat if you want to keep them on.



### Clean your home with non-toxic products.

- It is easy and cheap to make effective, non-toxic cleaners. You can use common items like vinegar and baking soda.
- Get recipes to make your own non-toxic cleaning products in the Resources section at: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>





### Don't dry-clean your clothes.

Many dry cleaning systems use toxic chemicals. Dry cleaned clothes release these chemicals, exposing you and polluting the air in your home.

- Use water instead. Most clothes labeled “dry-clean only” can be washed with water. Hand wash these clothes or ask your dry cleaner to “wet clean” them for you.



### Plastics: Use less and pick carefully.

Some plastics release toxic chemical like vinyl chloride, phthalates and bisphenol A. For more information and resources, go to our website: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>

- Choose glass, stainless steel or ceramic.
- Heat makes plastic release chemicals. Don't use plastic container for hot foods or drinks. Use glass instead of plastic in the microwave.
- Avoid products made with soft PVC, which is plastic number 3. Some shower curtains and toys are made with PVC.
- Avoid disposable plastic products. Plastic waste pollutes our environment. Toxic chemicals in the environment tend to end up in our bodies.



- If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy and are exposed to toxic substances at work, request a change in your duties. Talk to your doctor or your union for guidance. You can find more information about pregnancy and work in the Resources section at: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>
- If you live with anybody who works with toxic chemicals, that person should change and shower after work. The person should also keep work tools and clothing away from other people and living areas in the home. Work clothes should be washed separately.
- Get more information or file a complaint with your regional Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office if you believe that your employer is violating OSHA standards or that your workplace poses serious hazards. You can find a directory of regional OSHA offices by calling 800-232-4636.
- If you are a farm worker, you can find information about reducing your exposure to agricultural pesticides in the Resources section at: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>



## Prevent Exposure At Work

Many substances used on the job, in office buildings, or in workplace renovation projects are toxic to reproductive health.



**By law, you have a right to a safe and healthy work environment.**

- Get information and training about hazardous substances in your workplace. Your employer is required by law to provide information and training about workplace hazards, including access to handouts about toxic substances called SDSs (Safety Data Sheets).
- Follow guidelines to avoid exposure. Use protective gear.
- Ask your employer about substitutes for toxic substances and other ways to prevent harmful exposures.



**Choose safer home improvements.**

Many paints, glues and flooring materials can release toxic chemicals long after you complete a project.

- Ask for “VOC-free” and “water-based” materials.
- If you are pregnant, don’t work on or near remodeling projects.
- Stay away from recently remodeled rooms.
- For more information and resources, go to our website: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>



**Keep mercury out of your diet, home, and garbage.**

- Choose fish that are less contaminated with mercury. Find information on healthy and environmentally sustainable fish in the Resources section at: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>
- Check local fish advisories. Fish advisories are warnings about fish. Don’t eat the fish you or others catch before checking these warnings to make sure the fish is safe to eat. Learn more about fish advisories in the Resources section at: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>
- Replace your mercury thermometer with a digital one. Don’t throw your mercury thermometer or any other item containing mercury (such as compact fluorescent light bulbs) in the trash. To contact your local health department, call the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at 800-232-4636.







### Avoid pesticides and other toxic substances in food and water.

- Whenever possible, eat organic food to reduce your exposure to pesticides. If you can't buy organic produce, choose the fruits and vegetables with the least pesticide residue and avoid the most contaminated ones. Learn more about reducing your exposure to pesticides from food in the Resources section at: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>
- Limit foods high in animal fat. Many toxic substances build up in animal fat.
- Avoid canned foods and beverages as much as you can. Eat fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. This helps you avoid exposure to BPA. BPA is a toxic substance used in the lining of most cans.
- For more information and resources, go to our website: <https://prhe.ucsf.edu>



### Avoid lead exposure.

There may be lead in house paint, dust, and garden soil. Any home built before 1978 may have lead paint.

- Call the National Lead Information Center for information about how to prevent exposure to lead at: 800-424-LEAD.
- If you have lead paint in your home, cover it with a fresh coat of paint, wallpaper or tiles.
- Never sand or remove lead paint yourself. Hire a contractor who is certified in lead abatement.



### Select flame-retardant-free foam products.

Crib mattresses, nap mats and other upholstered products can have flame retardants. These substances can harm health and affect a child's brain.

- Select foam products labeled as "flame-retardant-free" or tagged as compliant with TB-117-2013.
- Learn more about radon by calling 1-800-SOS-RADON.

