



THE ADMINISTRATOR

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Policy on Children's Health

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Ensuring the protection of children's environmental health is foundational to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's mission to protect human health and the environment. Therefore, it is EPA's policy to protect children from environmental exposures by consistently and explicitly considering early life exposures and potential lifelong health impacts in all human health decisions.

Children's environmental health refers to the effect of environmental exposure during early life, beginning with parental reproductive health and continuing through infancy, early childhood and adolescence to adulthood. EPA's policy is informed by the scientific understanding that children may be at greater risk to environmental pollutants than adults due to differences in behavior and biology and that the effects of early life exposures may also arise in adulthood or in later generations.

All people go through a sequence of developmental life stages; viewed this way, children are not a distinct subpopulation. Exposure to pollutants during early life is a key consideration in the assessment of how environmental impacts shape human health over the course of a lifetime.

Children can be at a greater risk to environmental hazards due to activity patterns, behaviors and biology. Behaviors including crawling and hand-to-mouth activity may contribute to increased exposure. The dietary needs of children and means of acquiring nutrition also vary from that of adults (i.e., breast and bottle feeding). While human milk provides numerous benefits, certain pollutants can find their way into breast milk and infant formula. Children eat more food, drink more water and breathe more air in proportion to their body weight as compared to adults, and the variety of the foods they consume is more limited. As children are growing and developing, they do not respond to toxic substances in the same way as adults. The timing of exposure to pollutants is critical in protecting human health, as children may be more or less sensitive than adults when confronted with an equivalent level of exposure to an environmental pollutant.

In implementing this policy, EPA will identify, evaluate and use in decision-making environmental health data that can help characterize human health outcomes over the course of a lifetime. To the degree permitted by available data in each case, EPA will conduct a quantitative or qualitative risk assessment to inform the selection of levels of protection. A demonstration that infants and children are not expected to be exposed to the stressor under examination will be provided, as necessary. In certain circumstances, assessment of aggregate and cumulative exposures may be necessary to properly characterize risks to children. EPA will properly disclose and make plans to address data limitations and gaps. EPA is committed to protecting children where they live, learn, play and work using human health-related science, risk assessment, regulations, compliance and enforcement, partnerships, communications and research.

EPA has been and continues to be dedicated to protecting children’s environmental health in support of Executive Order 13045: *Protection of Children from Environmental Health and Safety Risks*, and implementation of children’s health protective directives established under the environmental statutes EPA implements. Any questions relating to this policy and its implementation should be referred to the Director of EPA’s Children’s Health Protection Division in the Office of Applied Science and Environmental Solutions.

This policy supersedes EPA’s 2021 Policy on Children’s Health.



Lee M. Zeldin