

Snohomish Midwives  
57 Cedar Avenue  
Snohomish, WA 98290  
877-869-6105  
Fax: 360-563-2662

## **Environmental Exposure and Your Baby's Health**

Certain environmental pollutants found in the air we breathe, in the water we drink, and in the chemicals we come into contact with each day, such as household cleaners and gasoline for our cars, may pose a risk to your unborn baby. For most of these substances, you would have to be exposed to very large, concentrated amounts over a substantial period of time in order for them to cause harm to your baby. However, we advise that you take certain preventive measures when coming into contact with the following chemicals during your pregnancy.

We do not wish this information to be overly anxiety producing for you. Instead, we want you to be informed so that you may attempt to reduce your exposure whenever and wherever you are able. Below, we highlight the most common toxins that you are most likely to come into contact with and provide you with information about how to avoid them as best you can.

- **Gasoline**- The March of Dimes suggests that you avoid pumping your own gasoline whenever possible while you are pregnant. Instead, have your partner or a friend fill up your tank for you. If you are in a situation where you must pump your own gasoline, make sure the gas station has fume guards on its gas pump nozzles and avoid inhaling the gasoline fumes as much as possible.
- **Pesticides**- There isn't any proof that eating pesticide treated foods from the U.S. pose a risk to the fetus (foods from other countries with lax pesticide treatment regulations may be of concern). However, all insecticides are inherently poisonous and studies suggest that high levels of exposure to pesticides may contribute to miscarriage, pre-term delivery, and birth defects. Therefore, we suggest that you completely avoid working with, applying, or being in close vicinity to pesticides during your pregnancy.
- **Household and Workplace Cleaners**- Numerous readily available, safe, and inexpensive (think baking soda and vinegar) cleaners exist. We suggest that you avoid using commercial-brand cleaning products whenever possible while you are pregnant because of concerns about the potential toxicity of their ingredients. If it is necessary that you use such products, you should do so in a well ventilated area, wear gloves, and wear a painter's mask to prevent the inhalation of fumes.
- **Heavy Metals**- Heavy metals may pose pregnancy risks such as miscarriage, stillbirth, and placental defects. You should be concerned about your heavy metal exposure if you live near a metal smelter, work as a welder, or live near a hazardous waste site. Heavy metals are also used to preserve pressure-treated lumber, so you should avoid wood dust from home construction projects while pregnant. Many ceramics and glass glazes, and some types of paints and fabric

dyes are known to contain heavy metals. Working with heavy metal-containing products should be avoided as much as possible while you are pregnant. It is advised that if you come into contact with them you should wear a mask and gloves, and that you should wash your clothing immediately after exposure. Mercury is a heavy metal that is found in certain fish. At high levels it can be harmful to your child's developing nervous system, therefore, it is advised that you completely avoid eating large, long-lived fish such as shark, tilefish, swordfish, and mackerel. Other types of seafood and fish such as shrimp, tuna (fresh and canned), salmon, pollock, and catfish also contain mercury, but they contain lower levels than larger fish do. The FDA states that it is safe for pregnant women to consume 12 ounces (2 average servings) per week of these lower-mercury-containing foods and 6 ounces (1 average serving) per week of tuna.

- **Lead**- Very few pregnant women in the United States are exposed to concerning levels of lead, however, lead is readily absorbed into the body's tissues and in large concentrations it can cause miscarriage and brain damage. If you have lead pipes in your home, lead solder on copper pipes, or brass faucets you may want to consider having your water tested for lead. Some arts and crafts materials such as oil paints, ceramics glazes, stained glass materials, and chipped or peeling house paint applied before 1978 contain high levels of lead.
- **Organic Solvents**- Solvents are substances known to cause birth defects. The most commonly known solvents are alcohols, degreasers, paint thinners, and varnish removers. Some lacquers, silk-screening inks, and paints have solvents in them. If you use solvents in arts and crafts, photography development, graphic design, or silk-screen printing, or if you work in a factory or as a lab technician, you need to be sure that your workspace is very well ventilated, be sure to wear a mask, and do not eat or drink in your work area.