

CRC Day of General Discussion on Children's Right and the Environment

Working group 1 on Children's exposure to environmental toxicants

Thank you Chairperson. My name is Alison Linnecar and I speak on behalf of the International Baby Food Action Network.

In his recent report, Mr. Baskut emphasized that « All around the world children are born with dozens, perhaps hundreds, of hazardous substances in their bodies». Among them, Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals, EDCs, consist of toxic chemicals which « interfere with the normal expression of genes, brain development and the function of hormones ... necessary for children to grow into healthy adults. »

As shown by recent scientific research, fetuses, infants and young children are especially vulnerable to chemical exposures.

During the **pre-natal** stage of fetal development, women are also vulnerable to exposures and can transmit chemical residues to the developing fetus in their womb. Most important, the Special Rapporteur recognized that there is "increasing evidence of the possibility that exposures by males to toxic chemicals can affect the health of their children." Indeed, EDCs impersonate the body's hormones, especially the female hormone estrogen; even infinitesimally small doses can cause altered hormone levels with negative impact on men's reproductive health, including the quality of their sperm. WHO reports that « Exposure of female fetuses leads to their masculinization, whereas exposure of male fetuses to anti-androgens results in feminization ... male fetuses are more susceptible to endocrine disruption than females. »

Despite these well identified risks, both fathers-to-be as well as mothers-to-be are continually exposed to EDCs in their work, at home and in their leisure activities, through pesticides, foods, cosmetics, sunscreen creams and other everyday products.

Exposures classified as **postnatal** occur after delivery. In particular, it is known that formula feeding entails chemical contamination with an endocrine disrupting effect. This week's UNEP report confirms that Bisphenol A, and its substitutes BPS and BPF, are hormonally active and toxic to reproduction. Bisphenol A, S and F are found in polycarbonate plastic feeding bottles as well as in the epoxy resin linings of tin cans and kettles; this means that bottle-fed infants have triple exposures to substances that mimic estrogens and thyroid hormones, with negative, potentially lifelong effects on the reproductive system and on neurological development. In the same way, excessive levels of toxic chemical elements such as cadmium and arsenic are found in baby formulas – and there may also be high arsenic levels in the ground water used to make the feeds. Formula-fed baby girls and baby boys are equally at risk. On the contrary, breastfeeding protects babies' health against chemical exposures. Breastmilk contains live cells with antibodies and growth agents and strengthens the infant's maturing immune system, thereby mitigating the adverse impact of pre- and postnatal exposure to toxic chemicals, while formula feeding does not contain any of these protective components.

IBFAN therefore recommends that the CRC Committee require States parties to adopt legislation obliging manufacturers to fully disclose the levels of toxic chemicals including EDCs in their products. The CRC Committee should also recommend urgent government action to ban EDCs such as Bisphenol A, S and F. Most of all, everyone of us needs to work with governments and UN agencies on the elaboration of a UN International Framework Convention on Management of Chemicals and Waste, in order to unify the vast array of existing Conventions on chemicals, and to safeguard our own health and that of future generations.

Thank you.