

Chemicals and Your Health

“Since 1950, at least 70,000 new chemical compounds have been invented and dispersed into our environment. Only a fraction of these have been tested for human toxicity. We are, by default, conducting a massive clinical toxicology trial, and our children and their children are the experimental animals.” [Source: Herbert L. Needleman, M.D., Philip J. Landrigan, M.D., [Raising Children Toxic Free](#)]



You can't raise healthy children in a sick environment!

Nurses: A Trusted Voice for Environmental Health



Our patients, their families, and our communities are under threat. We have an obligation to learn about this threat, engage our nursing skills, speak the truth, and guide public policy for healthy environments.

We must honor our covenant with the public and the public's health.

Developed by:

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In the last several years, the Centers for Disease Control National Health and Nutrition Exam Study have begun to measure the presence of toxic chemicals in the blood, urine, and breast milk of thousands of Americans.

Unfortunately, hundreds of these toxic chemicals are commonly found in all of our bodies. Even more alarming is the fact that fetal cord blood contains similar contaminants -- an indication of a mother's unwitting donation of toxic environmental chemicals to her child. Because of our science-based practice, nurses understand the connection between the environment, human health, and disease.



Toxic chemicals have been identified in the blood, urine, and breast milk of thousands

At the same time that our bodies are becoming repositories for some of the most poisonous chemicals in our environment, the following health trends thought to have an environmental component are on the rise:

- The prevalence of asthma doubled between 1982 (34.8) and 2003 (69.4).
- Autism has increased more than tenfold from less than 3 cases per 10,000 people in the 1970s to more than 30 per 10,000 in the 1990s.
- 1 in 6 children now have a learning or developmental disability.
- A women's lifetime risk of breast cancer has risen from 1 in 22 (1940s) to 1 in 7.
- There is a 15% infertility rate.
- Certain childhood cancers are on the rise.

NURSES CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Make a difference in your work setting:

- Work with other colleagues in your facility to initiate a pollution prevention committee in your facility. If one exists - join it.
- Learn about the link between environmental exposures and health and help nurses and others in your facility understand the link.
- Get involved in purchasing decisions in your facility in order to eliminate the use of harmful products and materials in the workplace.
- Encourage your facility to join Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E) which, along with 6000 other hospitals and health care facilities is taking a leadership role in reducing their environmental impact while saving money and reducing liabilities.
- Educate patients, friends and family to help spread the word...encourage them to take action.

Make a difference in your professional association:

- Encourage your association to offer environmental health educational opportunities to the membership.
- Create an environmental health column for your association's newsletter.
- Create an Environmental Health Task Force entity within your association.
- Initiate or support legislation that seeks to protect nurses, your patients, and communities from environmental toxins and hazards.
- Collaborate with other professionals, policy makers, advocacy groups, and the public to promote local, state, national and international efforts that address environmental health concerns where you live, work and play.

Make a difference in public policy:

- Vote for candidates that support environmental health issues.
- Join with your state nurses associations and specialty nursing association to advance environmental health public policy. While one person can do great things, large constituencies have greater influence.
- Build a relationship with your state and federal legislators so you can be their "go to nurse" when they have questions on environmental health care issues. The American Nurses Association has formalized this program through the Nurse Political Action Leaders (N-PAL) on a federal level: (<http://nursingworld.org/gova/>).
- Work on a campaign to elect a candidate that supports environmental health issues.
- Be a part of your association's grass roots action team to influence critical votes on environmental health issues. On a federal level, you can join The American Nurses Association's *Nurses Strategic Action Team* (N-STAT): (<http://nursingworld.org/gova/>).
- Write letters to the Editor of your local paper to spread the word about important environmental issues.
- Testify on an environmental health issue before the state legislature or Congress.
- Contribute to nursing political action committees (PACs), which raise funds for legislators to support worthy candidates for state and federal office who have demonstrated their belief in the environmental health issues.
- Educate your nurse legislators about important environmental health issues and encourage them to become environmental health advocates.
- Run for office.
- Seek a political appointment on the state or federal level that determines environmental policy.
- Work for a federal or state agency that determines environmental policy.