



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

THE ADMINISTRATOR

2021 Policy on Children's Health

October 5, 2021

It is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's policy to protect children from environmental exposures by consistently and explicitly considering early life exposures and lifelong health in all human health decisions. Children's environmental health refers to the effect of environmental exposure during early life: from conception, infancy, early childhood and through adolescence until 21 years of age. The EPA's policy is informed by the scientific understanding that children may be at greater risk to environmental contaminants 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. Childhood is a life stage experienced by everyone, and exposure to contaminants 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 unique activity patterns, behaviors and biology. They have unique behaviors such as breast feeding, crawling and hand-to-mouth activity that may contribute to increased exposure. Children eat more food, drink more water and breathe more air in proportion to their body size as compared to adults, and the variety of the foods they consume is more limited. As children are still growing and developing, they do not respond to toxic substances in the same way as adults. For instance, their blood-brain barrier and metabolic processes are less mature. The timing of exposure to chemicals and other contaminants is critical in protecting human health. The same dose of a chemical during different periods of development can have very different consequences.

Children who live in highly exposed or underserved communities may have reduced biological resilience and ability to recover from exposure to environmental hazards. With new threats and worsening conditions resulting from climate change, the EPA has a greater responsibility to provide children with heightened focus, assessment and safeguards to protect their health.

In implementing this policy, the EPA will identify and integrate data to conduct risk assessments of children's health to inform decisions. To the extent that relevant data is available, a quantitative risk assessment will be conducted. When quantitative information is not available but risks to children may exist, a qualitative risk assessment will be performed. In certain circumstances, assessment of aggregate and cumulative exposures may be necessary to properly characterize risks to children. The EPA will disclose data limitations and gaps and undertake research to address the gaps. The 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.

The EPA has been and continues to be committed 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 the EPA implements. Any questions relating to this policy and its implementation should be referred to the director of the EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection.

This policy supersedes the EPA's 1995 Policy on Evaluating Risk to Children.


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