

## **New Brunswick Collaborative on Children's Health and the Environment**

### **Nurses' Group**

#### **FACT SHEET #1: BPA 101**

**Bisphenol A (BPA)** being declared a toxic substance by Health Canada is a wakeup call to all Canadians to be aware of the multitude of toxic chemicals that can have a negative impact on our health. It is estimated that 93 % of Canadians have measurable levels of BPA in their bodies.

#### **What is BPA?**

**BPA** is a chemical that mimics natural hormones, interfering with their normal function and producing adverse effects in individuals, their offspring and populations as a whole. (Wigle, 2003). Effects can include miscarriage, stillbirth, abnormal sperm counts, reduced fertility in males, birth defects and prostate cancer. (Collaborative for Health and Environment, 2010). Other research has linked this chemical to immune system dysfunction, breast cancer, heart disease and diabetes (Environmental Defence, 2010).

#### **What contains BPA?**

BPA is found most commonly in polycarbonate plastics (identified by the #7 recycling symbol) and epoxy resins. Polycarbonate plastics are used in water bottles, household appliances, food and drink containers, CDs, DVDs, laptops, cell phones and many other products. The most common use for resins is in the white lining of food cans, but they are also found in adhesives in sporting equipment, airplanes, cars, dental sealants, and the protective coatings around wire and piping (Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment, 2007; Smith and Lourie, 2009; Wigle, 2003).

In 2008 Health Canada removed BPA from baby bottles, as the risk to infants was deemed to be critical. BPA is a concern for all ages. However, babies and young children are particularly vulnerable to environmental threats because of differences in size, intake, and behaviour, and because their organs and detoxification systems are not fully developed. (Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment, 2008.)

#### **Main Source of Human Exposure to BPA: Food and Beverages**

BPA can leach from food and beverage containers as they age. Heat exposure, for example through heating food in a plastic container, increases the amount of BPA that leaches into the food. BPA also leaches into food stored in tin cans and into water stored in plastic bottles or containers (Environmental Defence, 2010).

## How to Avoid BPA

- Avoid canned products. Buy fresh or frozen products.
- Drink tap water.
- Reduce your use of plastic food and drink containers
  - Use glass food containers, or items made with ceramic or stainless steel (e.g., stainless steel water bottles).
  - Choose safer plastic (#1, #2, #4 or #5).
  - Avoid polycarbonate plastics (#3, #6 or #7).
  - Look for the label “BPA free” on products before purchase.
- Never heat plastic in the microwave, even if the product claims to be microwave safe!
- Breast feed your baby.
- Make your own baby food.
- Buyer beware – read labels.
- Write to industry requesting they remove BPA from their products.
- Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

## References

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