

Time to Protect Babies From Dangerous Products

From shortly after birth, mothers tenderly wash and pamper their infants with a wide range of baby products. These include soaps, shampoos, lotions, and dusting powders, some of which are used several times daily.

Most disturbing are three groups of widely used ingredients known as "hidden carcinogens" -- ingredients which are contaminated by carcinogens, or which break down to release carcinogens, or which are precursors of carcinogens -- to which infants are about 100 times more sensitive than adults.

1. The largest group of hidden carcinogens includes dozens of wetting agents or detergents, particularly PEGs, Laureths, and Cetareths, all of which are contaminated with the potent and volatile carcinogens ethylene oxide and dioxane. These carcinogens could readily be stripped off during ingredient manufacture, if the industry just made the effort to do so. Another hidden carcinogenic ingredient is lanolin, derived from sheep's wool, most samples of which are contaminated with DDT-like pesticides.
2. The second group includes another detergent, Triethanolamine (TEA) which, following interaction with nitrite, is a precursor of a highly potent nitrosamine carcinogen.
3. The third group includes Quaterniums and Diazolidinyl urea preservatives which break down in the product or skin to release the carcinogenic formaldehyde.

Of additional concern is another group of common preservatives, known as Parabens. Numerous studies over the last decade have shown that these are weakly estrogenic. They produce abnormal hormonal effects following application to the skin of infant rodents, particularly male, resulting in decreased testosterone levels, and urogenital abnormalities. Parabens have also been found to accumulate in the breasts of women with breast cancer.

The common use of Talc dusting powder can result in its inhalation, resulting in acute or chronic lung irritation and disease (talcosis), and even death.

Fragrances, containing numerous ingredients, are commonly used in baby products for the mother's benefit. However, over 25 of these ingredients are known to cause allergic dermatitis.

A final ingredient of particular concern is the harshly irritant sodium lauryl sulfate. A single application to adult human skin has been shown to damage its microscopic structure, increasing the penetration of carcinogenic and other toxic ingredients.

Most disturbing is the ready availability of safe alternatives for all these dangerous ingredients (longstanding information on which is detailed on the Cancer Prevention Coalition website, <http://www.preventcancer.com>). So, why is it that the multibillion-dollar cosmetic and toiletry industry has not acted on this information? The answer is that the major priority of the industry's trade association is "to protect the freedom of the industry to compete in a fair market place." At the same time, the association pursues a highly aggressive agenda against what it claims are "unreasonable or unnecessary labeling or warning requirements." As Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D.MA) stated at 1997 Hearings on the FDA Reform bill: "The cosmetics industry has borrowed a page from the playbook of the tobacco industry by putting profits ahead of public health."

Astoundingly, the interests of industry remain reinforced by the regulatory abdication of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), in spite of its authority under the 1938 Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetics (FD&C) Act. Clearly, the FDA is the lap dog, rather than the watchdog, of the industry.

Of even greater concern is the reckless failure of the federal National Cancer Institute and the "non-profit" American Cancer Society to inform the public of the avoidable risks of cancer from the use of baby products, especially in view of the escalating incidence of childhood cancers over recent decades. However, the silence of the American Cancer Society is consistent with its over \$100,000 annual funding from about a dozen major cosmetic and toiletry industries.