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Babies exposed to toxic chemicals whilst in the womb (6 September 2006)

*The latest study showing developing foetuses are being exposed to alarming levels of chemicals via the mothers' blood has found all pregnant women in a sample of over 300 had at least one gender-bending pesticide in their placenta.*



Embryos are abosrbing toxic chemicals which their mothers are exposed to in their daily lives

We all accumulate manmade chemicals, toxic or otherwise, in our fatty tissue after exposure through food, air, soil and water.

This is a concern for adults, but for pregnant women it is especially worrying as the toxics which have built up in the body have direct access to the developing baby, which is more vulnerable to the toxics.

This is particularly problematic in the case of endocrine disruptors, the so-called gender-bending chemicals which can damage or alter the reproductive development of an embryo as it grows.

Scientist María José López Espinosa, of the University of Granada, has carried out a study of the chemical make-up of the placentas of women in the city and found that all 308 analysed contained at least one organochlorine pesticide and on average contained eight.

López was looking for 17 pesticides in the placental tissue and found DDE was in a staggering 92.7% while three others, lindane, endosulfan diol and endosulfan-I were all in more than half of the tissue samples.

Some of the samples had as many as 15 of the 17 chemicals present.

Factors that tended to lead to higher levels of pesticides were age - as women had had more time to accumulate the toxins, high body mass index - with more fatty tissue meaning more storage space, less weight gained during pregnancy, lower levels of education, lower baby weight and first time motherhood.

While the study provides insight into the prevalence of contamination, it does not attempt to give conclusive answers on what effect the exposure may be having.

"We do not really know the consequences of exposure to disruptive pesticides in children, but we can predict that they may have serious effects, since this placenta exposure occurs at key moments of the embryo's development," said López.

The research group to which she belongs has conducted several studies which link pre-birth exposure to pesticides with malformations if the genito-urinary system, such as undropped testicles and the

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