

# Ways to reduce the number of chemicals in your child's life

*Everyday advice for you as a parent*



Region Örebro County

Occupational and Environmental Medicine

# Chemicals are everywhere

We are constantly exposed to chemicals as they are everywhere in our environment and our lives. Some are harmful, some are not. They can be found in many of our everyday products, such as textiles, electronics, furniture, toys, and plastic products.

We can absorb chemicals into our body via the food we eat and the water we drink. When we use certain products, they could leak substances that then enter our body.

In today's world chemicals can be found everywhere, and it is not known how they affect our health and the environment in the long term. That is why we need to be cautious and avoid substances that are suspected of having an adverse effect on our health.





# Children are children and not small adults

As a child's body is not fully developed, they are more sensitive to chemicals than adults.

Children explore their surroundings by tasting, sucking, and touching things. They breathe more quickly, and they eat and drink more in relation to their body weight compared to adults. If they are exposed to the same number of chemicals as an adult, they could absorb more in relation to their weight.

Chemicals could, for example, affect the child's brain and immune system. It is advisable to reduce the number of chemicals your child is exposed to in everyday life.

In this brochure we provide you with advice on:

- Food and water
- Washing and cleaning
- Electronics and toys
- Cosmetic products



# Follow specific advice about food

Certain foods could contain metal residue, environmental toxins, or insecticides. Rice products could contain arsenic for example. Fatty fish caught in the Baltic, the Gulf of Bothnia, Lake Vänern and Lake Vättern could contain environmental toxins such as dioxins and PCBs.

The National Food Agency therefore issues specific advice and guidelines on how often children, young people, pregnant women, and women who are breastfeeding can eat these and other foods to ensure they avoid any adverse effects.





# Check the drinking water from your well

If you have your own well you are personally responsible for carrying out regular quality controls to ensure the water is not harmful to health. This is particularly important if you are pregnant or if the water is drunk by children. A foetus or a child is more sensitive than an adult to high levels of certain substances, such as lead. It is recommended that you check the water at least once every three years. Your local authority can provide you with information about what needs to be

measured in your particular area. The National Food Agency provides advice on what you are required to do when you analyse your water.

## **Always use cold water**

Hot tap water could contain copper from the pipes. You should therefore let the tap run until the water is cold, even when you only plan to use the water for cooking. This applies to water from the municipal water supply as well as water from your own well.

# Use glass and ceramic containers when you heat up food and liquids

You should preferably not heat up baby formula in a microwave using plastic bowls or other plastic containers. The heat releases chemicals in the plastic, which could then be transferred to food and liquids.

Even if the plastic is approved for children and for use in a microwave, it is still recommended that you heat up food in a glass or ceramic container or in a pan on the stove.





# Store chemical products safely

Certain chemicals can be extremely harmful to health. Chemical products and medicines should therefore be stored in their original packaging and be kept where children cannot see or reach them.

Even if the products are in a room a child would not normally enter, it

is important to put the products out of reach. This also applies to other products, such as batteries, lighter fluid, and washing-up liquid.

To reduce the risk of accidents, think carefully about which chemical products you really need.





# Keep dust away

Products found in the home could spread chemical substances into the air or into dust that has collected on surfaces. The more products there are in the home, such as toys, textiles, and electronics, the more chemicals there are that could be released into the indoor environment.

## **Good ventilation and airing**

Paint, building materials, and textiles all release chemicals – and they do so most frequently when they are new. You should be particularly careful to air the room after you have renovated or purchased new furniture.

## **Mopping**

As young children often play and crawl around on the floor, they could breathe in or swallow dust. You should therefore think carefully about keeping dust away from floors and other surfaces as much as you can. Certain vacuum cleaner filters permit tiny particles of dust to pass through them, allowing the particles to return to the room. It is advisable to mop floors and wipe down surfaces regularly.

Choose environmentally labelled products whenever possible as they have undergone stricter health and environmental controls.



# Wash new clothes and textiles

Chemicals are often used to give textiles colour, to prevent them from creasing, or from being damaged by moisture when they are transported over long distances.

You should therefore wash new textiles, such as clothes, bedding,

towels, and soft toys, before using them for the first time. You should preferably use an environmentally labelled, fragrance-free detergent. It would be better for your health and for the environment.



# Ensure goods purchased online are safe

Goods purchased outside the EU could contain substances that are banned in Sweden. These include softening agents in plastic toys and lead in jewellery. Products sold within the EU are subject to certain legal requirements relating to chemicals. When you buy online for example, it is recommended that you think carefully about which country the product comes from.

## Stricter rules within the EU

In the case of toys and electronics, you can check to see if the product is CE-marked. This is confirmation by the manufacturer that the products satisfy European safety requirements. This does not necessarily mean the products are free from harmful chemicals, but they must at least meet basic EU health, environmental, and safety requirements.



# Choose age-appropriate toys for your child

There are special rules governing the chemical content of toys and other products designed for children. The rules are particularly strict for toys that a child could put in their mouth. You should therefore try to prevent young children from sucking on toys intended for older children.

Nor should children use or play with keys, mobile phones, or other objects as they could leak harmful chemicals.

## Stricter rules within the EU

Toys should be CE-marked. This is confirmation by the manufacturer that the products satisfy European safety requirements. This does not necessarily mean the products are free from harmful chemicals, but they must at least meet basic EU health, environmental, and safety requirements.







# Reduce the use of cosmetic products

Products that you use to wash or moisten your body, wash your hair, or use as make-up, are known as cosmetic products. They all contain chemicals. You should therefore not use more shampoo, soap, or skin cream than is necessary. As a parent you should try to choose products that are adapted to your child's age.

## **Avoid scented products**

Fragrances used in different products could be allergenic. You should therefore choose unscented products for your child. As a parent of a young children, you should also use unscented products as your child is frequently close to you.



# Baby wipes should only be used in exceptional circumstances

As many baby wipes are scented and contain preservatives, it is unnecessary to expose children to these substances. Even if unscented wipes are used, the preservatives could cause an allergic reaction.

You should therefore use a flannel and water under normal circumstances and only use wipes on the odd occasion – when you are out travelling for example.





# Further reading

Sources and further information:

## **Food and water**

Read more on the Food Agency website, [www.livsmedelsverket.se](http://www.livsmedelsverket.se)

## **Children and chemicals**

If you would like to know more about children and chemicals, go to the 1177 Healthcare Guide website, [www.1177.se](http://www.1177.se)

## **Specific substances**

If you have any thoughts regarding specific chemical substances, go to the Chemical Agency website, [www.kemi.se](http://www.kemi.se)

## **Cosmetic products**

Further information is available on the Medical Products Agency website, [www.lakemedelsverket.se](http://www.lakemedelsverket.se)

# Contact us

If you have any questions, you can contact Occupational and Environmental Medicine at Örebro University Hospital.

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Den här broschyren är på engelska, men finns även tillgänglig på svenska, arabiska, persiska och somaliska. Innehållet är senast reviderat i april 2021.

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## What can I do?

Chemicals can be found everywhere, and certain chemicals could have an adverse effect on our health. We still do not have a complete picture of how they affect us and our environment. But what we do know is that it is good for us and for the environment if we come into contact with fewer chemicals.

This brochure provides advice on the choices you can make to reduce the number of chemicals you are exposed to in everyday life.



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