

Babies in womb exposed to 'gender-bending' chemicals

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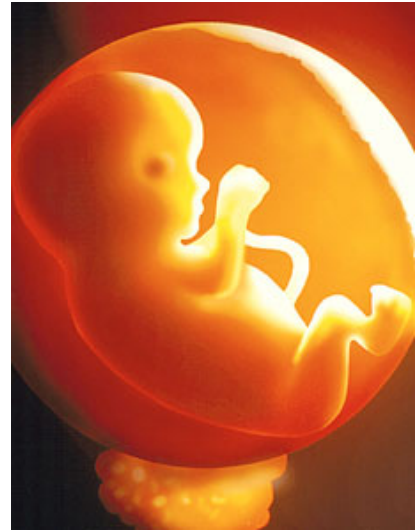
Babies are being exposed to "gender-bending" chemical pesticides before they are even born, disturbing new evidence has showed.

Tests on blood taken from the placentas of pregnant women revealed up to fifteen different types of pesticide, the research found.

Worryingly, the chemicals were found in every single one of the 308 women tested.

The findings will fuel concern about the chemicals, known as hormone disruptors or EDCs - endocrine-disrupting chemicals.

High levels of exposure have been linked to reproductive abnormalities - so-called gender-bending - because they upset the hormonal development of the embryo.



The effects are already being seen in nature where some species of fish and animals with deformed sex organs have been found.

Scientists blame agricultural pesticides and other hazardous chemicals such as those found in flame retardants which have leaked into the environment.

Last year a similar report by WWF-UK and Greenpeace found that babies are being exposed to a whole array of chemicals at the most vulnerable point in their development.

Tests on the blood of 30 newborn babies found the presence of eight different groups of chemicals, ranging from cleaning products to chemicals used to make plastics and non-stick waterproof coatings.

A study led by scientists at the University of Rochester in New York also found that common chemicals found in thousands of household products such as soaps and make-up can harm the development of unborn baby boys.

The results reinforce calls for pregnant women to be especially careful about their diet and for the reduction of chemicals in food production.

The latest findings were made by the Department of Radiology and Physical Medicine at the University of Granada in Spain.

Analysis of the placentas revealed the "presence of seventeen endocrine disruptive organochlorine pesticides" - the so-called gender benders.

Some patients' placentas contained 15 of the 17 pesticides tested for.

Maria Jose Lopez Espinosa, who headed the research, feared that the chemicals could cause health problems for children who suffered exposure in the womb.

She said: "The results are alarming: 100 per cent of these pregnant women had at least one pesticide in their placenta but the average rate amounts to eight different kinds of chemical substances."

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

The modern, chemical-laden environment can be especially harmful to pregnant women. During the gestation period, contaminants which accumulate in fatty tissues, access the unborn child via the blood supply and the placenta.

The Spanish research was carried out at San Cecilio University Hospital among 308 women who had given birth between 2000 and 2002. Tests were performed on 668 samples.

The study also found a higher presence of pesticides in older mothers and those who had a higher Body Mass Index.

Miss Espinosa believed that a healthy lifestyle with plenty of exercise, good food and no smoking would help combat the effect of "inadvertent exposure" to the chemicals.

She added, "It is possible to control pesticide ingestion by means of a proper diet, which should be healthy and balanced, through consumption of food whose chemical content is low.

"Moreover, daily exercise and the avoidance of tobacco, which could also be a source of inadvertent exposure, are very important habits which help to control the presence of pesticides in our bodies".

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