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Dioxins – A Serious Public Health Concern

July 15, 4:07 PM · Nancy Zielinski - Grand Rapids Public Health Examiner

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is holding hearings this week to review and hopefully establish safe levels of dioxin exposure. In the 1950s, research showed that dioxin undermines fetal development, damages the reproductive and immune systems, and causes severe skin lesions and other disorders. In the 1970s, dioxin was used as a defoliant by the United States during the Viet Nam conflict and identified as a contaminant in Agent Orange.

The World Health Organization, WHO, defines dioxins as a group of chemically-related compounds that are persistent environmental pollutants and highly toxic. They accumulate primarily in the fatty tissue of animals, and contaminates meat, fish, milk, cheese, and human breast milk. More than 90 percent of human exposure to this toxic chemical is through food.

Individuals that are most at risk to dioxin exposure is the developing fetus, newborn babies, as well as high consumers of fish and those working in the pulp and paper industry, incineration plants, and hazardous waste sites.

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) estimates that the general public may be exposed to as much as 1,200 more dioxin contamination in common foods than the amount considered negligible as a cancer risk. Data analyzed by EWG from peer-reviewed scientific reports has found that a breastfed infant three to six months old, with an average weight of 16 pounds, consumes up to 77 times more dioxin and dioxin-like compounds than the EPA's proposed safe daily dose.

To reduce your risk health experts suggest trimming fat from meat and consuming low-fat dairy products.

For more information on dioxin exposure in Michigan, please access the University of Michigan's Dioxin Exposure Study that was conducted in 2004 through 2006 at: <http://www.sph.umich.edu/dioxin/index.html>

<http://www.examiner.com/x-29099-Grand-Rapids-Public-Health-Examiner~y2010m7d15-Dioxins--a-serious-public-health-concern>