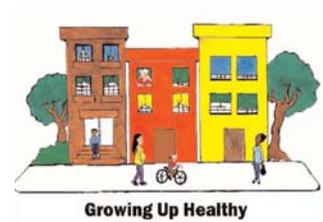




MOUNT SINAI
SCHOOL OF
MEDICINE

Mount Sinai Community Health Bulletin



PHTHALATES

Staying Healthy in a Changing Environment #2



Q. What do these everyday household items have in common?

A. These products sometimes contain chemicals called phthalates, which may be unhealthy.

What are Phthalates?

Phthalates (pronounced THAL-ates) are a family of chemicals added to some plastics to make them softer and more flexible. Phthalates are often found in products made of vinyl, or PVC. Household items that **may** contain phthalates include:

- vinyl flooring
- raincoats
- shower curtains
- some children's toys

Phthalates can also be used to make fragrances last longer in products such as cosmetics and perfumes. Nail polish may contain phthalates, which are added to make the polish last longer.

Are Phthalates Harmful?

Very few studies have examined the health effects of phthalates on humans. Research studies on how phthalates affect lab animals have shown health effects such as liver and kidney disease. Recent research suggests that phthalates might worsen asthma and allergies in humans. Many companies have removed phthalates from their products due to the suspected health effects. However, many products on the market still contain phthalates.

How Am I Exposed to Phthalates?

Phthalates can enter the body through direct contact with the skin. Phthalates can also enter the body through the mouth when babies or children bite or suck on vinyl toys. Phthalates have been removed from pacifiers, teething rings and rattles, but other toys are not required by law to be phthalate-free.

What Can I Do?

We don't yet know exactly how phthalates affect human health. Until more research is done, it makes sense to reduce our use of vinyl and PVC products as much as possible. Healthy alternatives to vinyl include products made of cloth, ceramic tile, metal and glass.

How Can I Tell If A Product Contains Phthalates?

There is no easy way to tell if a product contains phthalates. Look for labels that say "phthalate free" on infant and children's toys. Sometimes an item containing phthalates will have a distinct "plastic" odor. If you see a '3' or 'V' (or both) along with the recycling arrows stamped on an item, the plastic probably contains phthalates.



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