A Few Facts

Today, 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during her lifetime in the U.S. – that’s a 40% increase since the 1970s. Breast cancer is the most common cancer for women in the United States; it kills 40,000 women every year.

Of the 84,000 chemicals in current use, fewer than 10% have ever been tested for their effects on human health. Only five have been restricted or banned. There is no requirement for the chemical industry to prove safety. Yet, recent scientific studies have identified more than 200 chemicals that cause breast tumors in animals. We can be exposed to harmful chemicals through the environment in which we live: in our homes and workplaces; through food, air and water; and from everyday household products.

A 2013 report of a federal advisory committee, Breast Cancer and the Environment: Prioritizing Prevention, found that identifying and eliminating environmental causes of breast cancer is the best opportunity to reduce incidence of the disease. The committee concluded, “Prevention is the key to reducing the burden of breast cancer.”

Chemicals know no boundaries and some people have disproportionate exposures. People living in the north are more highly exposed to persistent and toxic chemicals that are carried into this region on wind and ocean currents from all over the world. These chemicals accumulate in the colder environment, animals, and humans.

There are a few known risk factors that can increase our susceptibility to breast cancer, such as family history, age, breast density, early menstruation, late menopause, late or no childbirth, alcohol consumption, occupation, and exposure to ionizing radiation. However, 50-70% of women with breast cancer do not have any of the known risk factors. Although certain genetic factors can make someone more susceptible to breast cancer, there are also many environmental causes that we can prevent through healthy choices and especially through collective action to change policy.

We have an opportunity to reduce and prevent our exposures to known cancer-causing substances. Some chemicals found to cause breast tumors in laboratory studies include:

• automobile exhaust and other air pollution, styrene (used in food packaging and building materials)
• certain flame retardants (used in furniture foam, electronics, and toys)
• perfluorinated chemicals (used in stick-resistant cookware and stain-resistant fabrics)
• vinyl chloride (used in shower curtains, children’s toys, and vinyl flooring).

Find Out More and Take Action

Take a stand for everyone in your community! Although it is important to make healthy choices for ourselves and our families, this is not a
problem we can “shop our way out of.” The laws governing chemicals are outdated and broken. We need to work together to demand state and federal policies that require chemicals to be proven safe. Please join us in this effort:

• Call or write your legislator and tell her or him that you want chemical policies that ensure that our products, homes, and workplaces are safe.
• Volunteer with Alaska Community Action on Toxics to become a leader in the movement to prevent harmful exposures and protect public health.
• Join our monthly Alaska Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE-Alaska) calls to learn more!

Market Changes
We have a right to know! Call the companies that make products you use in your home (such as personal care products, children’s toys, and cleaning products). Insist that they disclose the ingredients and prove their products are safe.

Healthy Choices
While we are working together for a more livable planet for everyone today and in the future, here are some things you can do in the meantime to reduce your exposure:

• Never microwave in plastic. Use glass instead.
• Avoid stain-resistant fabrics.
• Use fragrance-free personal care and household products to reduce exposure to phthalates.
• Avoid plastic water bottles to reduce exposure to BPA and its relatives (e.g., BPF, BPAF, BPS, etc.). As much as possible, avoid canned foods in favor of fresh or frozen foods.
• Use stainless steel or cast iron cookware; avoid cookware treated with stick-resistant coatings (e.g., Teflon™).
• Avoid anti-microbial products. Keep hands clean with soap and water.
• Keep your home clean. Take off shoes at the door, use a damp cloth or mop to eliminate dust, vacuum with a HEPA filter, and clean with non-toxic products.
• If possible, eat organic produce and meat. If you garden, avoid the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
• Reduce exposure to gasoline fumes and exhaust; avoid tobacco smoke.
• Use a fan and ventilate when cooking. Avoid charred and burned food.
• Avoid dry cleaners that use the industrial solvent PERC. Choose “wet cleaning” option.
• Purify drinking water using a solid carbon block water filter.
• Avoid furniture and toys containing flame retardants.

For more information and to become involved, please contact us.

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