

Yard and Garden: Hazards

How Are We Exposed?

Even if you do not use pesticides in your own yard, your children and your pets may be at risk of exposure. Pesticides applied by a neighbor can present a health hazard for you and your loved ones, especially if the wind is blowing towards your property when spraying occurs. There are three routes of exposure for pesticides, including: oral ingestion, absorption through the skin, and inhalation.

- Breathing air contaminated by pesticides.
- Playing in grass that is covered in pesticide residue.
- Eating vegetables, fruits, or berries grown with pesticides.
- Exposure to pesticide residues that have been tracked into the home from outside and rest in carpets, and on window sills and other flat surfaces.

In addition to exposure to pesticides used for outdoor residential use, there are a number of other ways we can be exposed, including: exposure to pesticides found in store bought or subsistence foods we eat, pesticides used to treat pets for fleas and ticks, and pesticides used for indoor pest control.

What Happens to Pesticides After They Are Applied?

Some pesticides persist in the environment long after they are initially applied. The synthetic chemicals leach into soils and waterways. Studies have shown that glyphosate, the active ingredient in the herbicide Roundup, can migrate from where it is applied and is mobile in soil.

For more information on glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, see our glyphosate fact sheet.

What About Children and Pesticides?

Maternal, in-utero, and early childhood exposures to pesticides, including 2,4-D and glyphosate used for residential use, have been associated with adverse health effects. Children are more vulnerable to the effects of pesticides than adults because:

- Relative to adults, children eat more in proportion to their body weight, resulting in more concentrated exposures.
- Children's skin is more permeable and their livers do not excrete as efficiently as adults'.
- Children's hand-to-mouth behavior increases their chance of ingesting pesticides.
- Children play on the ground outdoors and on the floor indoors increasing the chance of absorbing pesticides through their skin.

For information on 2, 4-D, the active ingredient in Weed-B-Gon, see our 2, 4-D factsheet.

What About Pets and Pesticides?

Dog and Cats are vulnerable to pesticides. Cats and dogs are more vulnerable to pesticides because they walk through chemically-treated areas unknowingly, absorb pesticides through their mouth, nose, and eyes, and can absorb through their skin any powder that sticks to their fur.

For more information on how to keep your pets safe, see *Pesticides and Pets: What you should know to keep your pets safe*, a factsheet published by Beyond Pesticides.

What About “Inert” Ingredients – Are They Safe?

Inert Ingredients - are they safe? Not necessarily. “Inert” or “other” ingredients are added to the pesticide formula to help transport the active ingredient to make it more effective. Companies are only required to list the product’s active ingredients. Unlisted inert ingredients may be chemically active and toxic, but under current law, these ingredients are not required to be tested for safety or listed on the label. Often referred to as “other ingredients” on labels, inert ingredients are noted as a percentage of the formula.

Alaska Community Action on Toxics is working to increase public disclosure of the inert ingredients in pesticide products. To learn more, see ACAT’s public comments to EPA.

Want more information?

See our pesticide fact sheets:

Mind Disrupted: How toxic chemicals change how we think and who we are

Evidence Links Chronic Illnesses and Pesticide Exposure

Or visit:

Beyond Pesticides

Washington Toxics Coalition

Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides

Pesticide Action Network North America