Exposure to Toxic Environmental Agents
ACOG/ASRM Committee Opinion

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The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) is the nation’s leading group of physicians providing health care for women. With more than 57,000 members, ACOG strongly advocates for quality health care for women, maintains the highest standards of clinical practice and continuing education of its members, promotes patient education, and increases awareness among its members and the public of the changing issues facing women’s health care.
Ob-gyns are primary care providers

- Ob-gyns provide more preventive services for women than any other provider type
- Only physician seen regularly by many women during their reproductive years
- Uniquely poised to intervene during preconception & pregnancy – critical windows of human development
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- Exposure to harmful environmental chemicals is ubiquitous
- Everyone, everywhere, everyday

43 Chemicals Found in Virtually Every Pregnant Woman in the US

Environmental chemicals can cross the placenta
All exposures are not created equal

Underserved and minority populations disproportionately impacted

More likely to be exposed to higher levels of outdoor and indoor pollutants
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All exposures are not created equal

Women of reproductive age with occupational exposure to toxic chemicals are highly vulnerable to adverse reproductive health outcomes.
Unlike pharmaceuticals, most chemicals enter marketplace without detailed data on reproductive toxicities

We don’t know:
- Where most harmful chemicals are used
- How we are exposed to them
- What the health risks from exposure might be
Ob-gyns don’t need to be experts in environmental health to provide useful information to patients. However, they should:

- Be familiar with their geographic area
- Take an exposure history early
- Provide information about how the food system affects health
- Communicate the science and areas of uncertainties about environmental exposures
Many Toxic Exposures Cannot Be Controlled by Individual Action
Individual Action Alone is Not Enough

MEET MOLLY GRAY.

Nine pregnant women tested from Washington, Oregon, and California, during the second trimester had detectable:
- Bisphenol A
- Mercury
- At least four phthalates
- At least two and up to 4 perfluorinated chemicals
When environmental chemicals act like uncontrolled medicine

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In the same way as medicines are delivered to produce effects in the endocrine system, environmental chemicals can be similarly delivered to produce unwanted endocrine effects, resulting in a staggering increase in several diseases. These effects on endocrine and other physiological systems can have significant population-level impacts and thus require public health approaches to disease control.

breast cancer risk, and women who were exposed to DDT before the age of 4 years exhibited the highest risk [7]. Elevated concentrations during adolescence of serum polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDE), a common flame retardant, are associated with a younger age of menarche, which in turn might contribute to increased risk of breast cancer [8].

Currently

Pharmaceuticals must show efficacy and safety *prior to exposing humans*

BUT

Manufactured chemicals currently need to show evidence of harm *prior to removing human exposure*

Woodruff, et al. 2011 Health Affairs. 30 (5): 931-7
Recommendations

Congress should enact truly meaningful preventative and protective chemical safety legislation that will:

1. Identify and reduce exposure to toxic environmental chemicals while addressing consequences of such exposures
2. Require EPA and other federal agencies to take all necessary actions when reviewing substances to guarantee health and safety
3. Fund rigorous scientific investigation into the causes and prevention of birth defects
Voters Support Chemical Safety Legislation

- Nearly two thirds of voters are concerned about chemicals in consumer products
- Almost 90% of voters support legislation that ensures products are safe for human use
- Support spans demographic and partisan lines

Conclusion

“Because individuals alone can do little about exposure to harmful environmental toxic agents, the authoritative voice of health care professionals in policy arenas is critical to translating emerging scientific findings into prevention-oriented action on a large scale.”