Dietary Exposure to Agricultural Pesticides
(are you what you eat?)

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Evaluation of Take-Home Organophosphorus Pesticide Exposure among Agricultural Workers and Their Children

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**Figure 1.** Plot of azinphosmethyl concentrations (n = 145) in vehicle dust (µg/g) versus azinphosmethyl concentrations in house dust (µg/g) by household (r² = 0.41; p < 0.0001). This plot includes samples with residue levels below the LOQ.

**Figure 2.** Plot of urinary dimethyl DAP concentrations (n = 206) in adult urine (µmol/L) versus child urine (µmol/L) by household (r² = 0.18; p < 0.0001). Creatinine-adjusted results are similar (r² = 0.15; p < 0.0001). This plot includes samples with metabolite levels below the LOQ.
Expected

Adult farmworkers
Kids of pesticide applicators
Kids of farmworkers =
Kids in farming communities
Kids in Seattle

*During “non-spray” seasons
Prohibits use of:

- Most synthetic pesticides, including organophosphates
- Synthetic fertilizers
- Genetic modification
- Irradiation
- Human biosolids ("sewage sludge")
- Antibiotics/synthetic hormones
Organophosphorus Pesticide Exposure of Urban and Suburban Preschool Children with Organic and Conventional Diets

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Organic Diets Significantly Lower Children’s Dietary Exposure to Organophosphorus Pesticides

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Reduction in urinary organophosphate pesticide metabolites in adults after a week-long organic diet

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Fig. 3. ΣDAP, ΣMP and ΣEP (creatinine corrected). Mild outliers are marked with a circle (O) and extreme outliers are marked with an asterisk (*) on the boxplot.
New study finds organic foods are healthier than conventionally grown foods

Organic Foods Not Necessarily Better
Study Questions Health Benefits of Eating Organic

Study of Organic Crops Finds Fewer Pesticides and More Antioxidants

Is It Worth Buying Organic? Maybe Not
New research questions whether organic produce and meats are really more nutritious or healthier than conventional varieties (MORE: Does Organic Food Turn You into a Jerk?)
Maternal/neonatal exposure

• Mother-child cohort studies suggest that low-level pesticide exposure in utero can have neurological and cognitive effects

• Unknown if pesticide exposure due to conventional diet is substantial enough to cause these detriments

• Unknown if organic diet could result in measurable health benefit

Seven-Year Neurodevelopmental Scores and Prenatal Exposure to Chlorpyrifos, a Common Agricultural Pesticide

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BACKGROUND: In a longitudinal birth cohort study of inner-city mothers and children (Columbia Center for Children’s Environmental Health), we have previously reported that prenatal exposure to chlorpyrifos (CPF) was associated with neurodevelopmental problems at 3 years of age.

OBJECTIVE: The goal of the study was to estimate the relationship between prenatal CFP exposure and neurodevelopment among cohort children at 7 years of age.

METHODS: In a sample of 265 children, participants in a prospective study of air pollution, we measured prenatal CPF exposure using umbilical cord blood plasma (pCFC plasma) and 7-year neurodevelopment using the Wexler Intelligence Scale for Children, 4th edition (WISC-IV). Linear regression models were used to estimate associations, with covariate selection based on two alternate approaches.

RESULTS: On average, for each standard deviation increase in CPF exposure (6.61 ppb), Full-Stature intelligence quotient (IQ) declined by 1.4% and Working Memory declined by 2.8%. Final covariates included maternal educational level, maternal IQ, and quality of the home environment. We found no significant interactions between CPF and any covariates, including the other chemical exposures measured during the prenatal period (environmental tobacco smoke and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons).

CONCLUSIONS: We report evidence of deficits in Working Memory Index and Full-Scale IQ as a function of prenatal CPF exposure at 7 years of age. These findings are important in light of continued widespread use of CPF in agricultural settings and possible longer-term educational implications of early cognitive deficits.

Key words: chlorpyrifos, neurodevelopment, pesticides. Environ Health Perspect 119:1196–1201 (2011). doi:10.1289/ehp.1003160 (Online 21 April 2011)

Each year, thousands of new chemicals are released in the United States, with very little documentation about potential long-term human health risks (Landrigan et al. 2002). First registered in 1965 for agricultural pest control purposes, chlorpyrifos (CPF), 0.0-diethyl-0,5,6- dichloro-2-pyridyl phosphonitrilic is a broad-spectrum, chlorinated organophosphate (OP) insecticide. Before regulatory action by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to phase out our residential use beginning in 2000, CPF applications were particularly heavy in urban areas, where the exposed populations included pregnant women (Berkowitz et al. 2003; Whyatt et al. 2002, 2003). In a sample of pregnant women in New York City (Perera et al. 2002) detectable levels of CPF were found in 99.7% of personal air samples, 100% of indoor air samples, and 64–70% of blood samples collected from umbilical cord plasma at delivery (Whyatt et al. 2002).

Early concerns about the possible neurotoxicity of OP insecticides for humans derived from rodent studies showing that prenatal and early postnatal exposure to CPF is associated with neurodevelopmental deficits, and these effects have been seen at exposure levels well below the threshold for systemic toxicity caused by cholinesterase inhibition in the brain (e.g., Soltis and Siddler 2005). Evidence has accumulated over the past decade showing that noncholinergic mechanisms play a role in the neurotoxic effects of CPF exposure in rodents, involving disruption of neural cell development, neurotransmitter systems (Addicott et al. 2005; Stokell 2004), and hyperactivity in different brain regions (Qiao et al. 2003). Such developmental disruptions have been associated with later functional impairments in learning, short-term working memory, and long-term reference memory (Levin et al. 2002).

In humans, OPs have been detected in amniotic fluid (Bradman et al. 2003) and are known to cross the placenta (Richardson et al., 1995; Whyatt et al. 2005), posing a threat to the unborn child during a period of rapid brain development. Using urinary metabolites as the biomarker of exposure, several different birth cohort studies have reported that prenatal maternal nonspecific OP exposure was associated with abnormal neonatal reflexes (Engel et al. 2007; Young et al. 2005), mental deficits and pervasive development disorder at 2 years (Eskamazi et al. 2007), and attention problems behaviors and a composite attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder indicator at 5 years of age (Marks et al. 2010).

Using a different biomarker of exposure (the parent compound of CPF in umbilical cord plasma), we have previously reported (in the same cohort as the present study) significant associations between prenatal exposure to CPF (> 6.17 ppm) and reduced birth weight and birth length (Whyatt et al. 2004), increased risk of small size for gestational age (Rash V, Whyatt R, Perera F, unpublished data), increased risk of mental and motor delay (< 80 points) and 3.5- to 6-points adjusted mean decrements on the 3-year Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Rash et al. 2006), and evidence of increased problems related to attention, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist at 2–3 years (Rash et al. 2006). Taken together, these prospective cohort studies show a consistent pattern of early cognitive and behavioral deficits related to prenatal OP exposure, across both agricultural and urban populations, using different biomarkers of prenatal exposure.

We undertook the present study to identify the developmental consequences of prenatal exposure to CPF in a sample of New York City children at 7 years of age. Given the mechanisms proposed in the rodent literature, and early findings from prospective human studies involving nonspecific OP exposure, we hypothesized that prenatal exposure to CPF would be associated with detriments in cognitive and behavior development.

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Supplemental Material is available online (doi:10.1289/ehp.1003160 via http://dx.doi.org).

We are grateful to the families of northern Manhattan who have so generously contributed their time and effort to the study.

This study was supported by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (grants SP01ES09680, P30ES01595, and SBIR ES08977), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (grants RP827007, 8208903, and RB880645), the Educational Foundation of America, the John and Wendy Neu Family Foundation, the New York Community Trust, and the Trustees of the Blanchette Hooker Rockfeller Fund.

The authors declare they have no actual or potential competing financial interests.

Received 2 November 2010; accepted 12 April 2011.
Remaining uncertainties regarding long-term exposure in vulnerable populations

• Chronic vs acute exposure measurement
  • Short half-lives
  • Short interventions

• Realistic dietary interventions
  • Most “organic consumers” don’t eat 100% organic

• Vulnerable population
  • No organic intervention studies to date in pregnant women

• Confounding
  • Observational studies are challenged by factors associated with the choice to consume organic

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Conventional Group – 10 Women

Organic Group – 10 Women

x 20
n=49 Referrals from WIC

25 Did not enroll
  1 Miscarriage
  13 Unresponsive to messages
  2 Not interested in participating
  9 Did not meet eligibility criteria
    1 Under age 18
    2 Outside delivery area
    1 High risk pregnancy
    3 Already eat organic
    2 Smoker

n=24 Provided informed consent

4 Withdraw
  3 Due to time commitment
  1 Miscarriage

n=20 Active participants: single blind

n=10 Randomized to conventional group
n=10 Randomized to organic group
• $20-worth of fresh fruit and vegetables delivered weekly to participants homes

• Deliveries continue throughout second and third trimester (up to $480 total)

• Partnership with local produce distributors and delivery service

• Convenient and easy for participants
Developed a study-specific food diary app

• Participants captured:
  • amount and type of all produce consumed (including photos)
  • whether it was provided by the study or not
  • and if not, whether it was conventional or organic
• Used to calculate number of conventional and organic servings of each type of produce consumed during the study
We collected 461 samples from 20 women over a 1-year period, representing an average of 23 weeks (~6 months) per participant.
**Universal pesticides panel**

- 2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid
- 2-Isopropyl-4-methyl-6-hydroxypyrimidine
- *para*-Nitrophenol
- 3,5,6-Trichloro-2-pyridinol
- Malathion dicarboxylic acid
- 3-Phenoxybenzoic acid
- 4-Fluoro-3-phenoxybenzoic acid
- *cis*-3-(2,2-Dichlorovinyl)-2,2-dimethylcyclopropane carboxylic acid
- *trans*-3-(2,2-Dichlorovinyl)-2,2-dimethylcyclopropane carboxylic acid

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24 weekly samples composited in 1 mL aliquots to create six “monthly” aggregate samples representing the second and third trimesters
Provision of organic fruits and vegetables *significantly* decreased exposure to 2,4-D (an herbicide) and 3-PBA (a metabolite of pyrethroid insecticides)
Conclusions

• Consumption of an organic diet significantly reduces exposure to synthetic agricultural pesticides, including herbicides and several classes of insecticides
  • This is true even when the diet is only partially organic

• For populations without occupational or residential sources, diet is the dominant route of exposure to several classes of synthetic agricultural pesticides

• This work demonstrates the feasibility of a randomized organic diet intervention study among pregnant women, which may be the best way to evaluate the health effects of dietary exposure to agricultural pesticides in conventionally grown food

Unpublished work presented here was funded by the Institute for Translational Health Sciences at the University of Washington.