

FDA Bans BPA in Baby Bottles: Good Move, but Not Enough

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After more than five years of pressing the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to restrict the toxic chemical bisphenol A, or BPA, in food packaging, the Breast Cancer Fund is heartened that the agency announced today a ban on the chemical in baby bottles and sippy cups. But given that Canada, the European Union, China, and at least five other countries as well as 11 U.S. states have prohibited the use of BPA in children's products, that every major baby bottle manufacturer has already stopped using the chemical, and that BPA is also found in canned food linings, some infant formula containers and other food packaging, this action is too little, too late.

The body of scientific evidence linking BPA to an increased risk of breast cancer and a whole host of other diseases has been mounting over the years we've been calling on the FDA to make a definitive determination on BPA's safety. Most of us are exposed to BPA every day. In fact, the CDC found BPA in 93 percent of all Americans tested, and the National Institutes of Health point to food packaging, including food cans, which are lined with BPA, as a major route of exposure. BPA has been found in the blood and urine of pregnant women, in the umbilical cord blood of newborns and in breast milk soon after women gave birth. Nearly 200 lab studies show that exposures to even low doses of BPA, particularly during pregnancy and early infancy, are associated with a wide range of adverse health effects later in life, including breast cancer. Studies show that BPA exposure can make non-cancerous breast cells grow and survive like cancer cells, and can actually make the cells less responsive to the cancer-inhibiting effects of tamoxifen, a drug used in the treatment of breast cancer.

The FDA's slow response to protect the public from BPA is in stark contrast to consumer outrage and business and legislative action. In March, the Breast Cancer Fund's Cans Not Cancer campaign publicized the fact that Campbell Soup Company will phase out the use of BPA in its can linings. Baby bottle and sports water bottle manufacturers abandoned BPA over the last few years. At the public policy level, 11 states have banned BPA from baby bottles and sippy cups, and three of those states have also banned it from infant formula and baby food packaging.

Scientists, consumers, retailers, manufacturers and the states are sending clear signals that BPA doesn't belong in any of our food packaging and that investment in safe alternatives is an investment in the health of the American public. Now the FDA needs to catch up. The FDA needs to take decisive action to ensure that all of us are protected from this toxic chemical. The agency should enact a ban on BPA in infant-formula containers by approving the petition submitted by Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass. The FDA should quickly release its long-awaited reassessment of the safety of BPA. And Congress should pass Rep. Markey's legislation, the Ban Poisonous Additives Act (H.R. 432), which would instruct the FDA to ban BPA from all food packaging.

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The Breast Cancer Fund is the leading national organization working to identify and eliminate the environmental causes of breast cancer. www.breastcancerfund.org