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New report: Maine doctors say pesticide exposure putting kids at risk for serious illness

Voters express strong support for state and local pesticide limits to protect children's and pets' health

A new report released today by Physicians for Social Responsibility, Maine Chapter highlights the serious risks to children's health from pesticide exposure and presents new data showing strong support among [Maine voters](#) for government action to prevent exposure and protect the health of children and pets.

Dr Sydney Sewall, a Maine pediatrician and member of Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine Chapter, stated, "Normal childhood behaviors, like crawling and putting things in their mouths, put our kids at more risk for dangerous pesticide exposures. Because children breath more rapidly and metabolize more quickly than adults, they absorb more of everything – the good and the bad."

The American Academy of Pediatrics says that prenatal and childhood exposure to pesticides is associated with childhood cancers like leukemia, learning disabilities and behavioral problems associated with medical conditions like ADHD.

[Today's report](#) finds that a strong majority of Maine voters (72%) are worried about their children's and pets' health from exposures to pesticides. An equally strong majority (71%) say they support bans on pesticides that are applied only for cosmetic purposes. Only a very small percentage of those surveyed (9%) believe that pesticides should be used without restrictions.

Karen D'Andrea, PSR Maine's Executive Director, says she was not surprised at the survey results. As a former Scarborough Town Councilor, D'Andrea helped to create and pass their current municipal ban. "I saw so many people concerned about pesticide use," said D'Andrea. "It was a local mom who drew my attention to the issue because she was worried about her kiddo."

The use of pesticides continues to grow. In the US alone, the use of [glyphosate \(the active ingredient used in Roundup\) has increased by more than 28,000% in the past 4 decades — from 0.4 million kg in 1974 to 113 million kg in 2014](#) – more than a 250-fold increase. In Maine, [it is estimated that between 1995-2011 pesticide sales increased 700%. Since 2011, data collection on pesticide sales and usage](#) has been limited, as a result of a LePage Administration's order to stop the record keeping process.

According to the Maine Board of Pesticide Control, there are 29 municipalities in Maine that have ordinances restricting pesticide use (this figure does not include towns like Scarborough that have pesticide policies). Some restrictions are very site specific, like the aerial application adjacent to Trafton Lake in Limestone, and some very broad, including full citywide bans in Ogunquit, Portland, and South Portland.

The new report is timely as Maine lawmakers consider LD 1888, An Act To Protect Children from Toxic Chemicals, which would ban the use of herbicides within 75' of schools, daycare centers, and playgrounds. The public hearing for LD 1888 is scheduled for Thursday, February 6th in the Health and Human Services Committee at the State House.

D’Andrea added, “Maine has an important opportunity to protect our children from exposures to these dangerous chemicals. Avoiding exposure is the best prevention. We can do better and it’s time for action. PSR Maine will support LD 1888 in order to prevent the serious illnesses that can dramatically impact families and children.”

A 2015 study shows that a cancer diagnosis in childhood can substantially affect the physical, psychosocial, and socioeconomic well-being of patients and their families. As an example, the study found that in 2009, a single pediatric cancer hospitalization cost in the United States averaged \$40,400, nearly five times higher than hospitalization for any other pediatric condition, with the greatest costs being for leukemia, at \$55,700. The report also found that rural families experienced a higher financial burden from cancer than urban families – all significant for Maine’s population and demographics.

Dr Philip Landrigan, a world renowned pediatrician and epidemiologist who first discovered the link between lead and children’s health, has said that one of his biggest concerns is pesticides.

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PSR Maine is a statewide organization of health professionals and advocates with over 3,000 members concerned about health threats from toxic chemicals, climate change, and nuclear weapons.