Pesticide Contamination In Baby Food

To determine the extent of pesticide contamination of baby food, we tested eight foods (applesauce, garden vegetables or pea and carrot blend, green beans, peaches, pears, plums, squash and sweet potatoes) made by the three major baby food producers that account for 96 percent of all baby food sales -- Gerber, Heinz, and Beech-Nut. All samples were purchased at retail from grocery stores in three major metropolitan areas; Philadelphia, Denver, and San Francisco. They were tested for pesticides using the Food and Drug Administration's standard pesticide analytical methods.

Sixteen pesticides were detected in the 8 baby foods tested, including three probable human carcinogens, five possible human carcinogens, eight neurotoxins, five pesticides that disrupt the normal functioning of the hormone system, and five pesticides that are categorized as oral toxicity category one, the most toxic designation.

Infants and children are not little adults.

They react differently than adults to many drugs and toxic substances, and in most cases they suffer more serious health damage as a result. This is why parents and doctors do not give children adult doses of drugs.

The EPA, in contrast, allows infants and children to eat adult approved doses of pesticides that have not been evaluated in terms of their safety for infants and young children.

A five year study by the National Academy of Sciences concluded in 1993 that government standards for pesticides in food do not specifically account for the special vulnerability of infants. They do not account for the additive or potentially greater than additive toxicity of pesticide combinations that occur in single food servings. They do not account for the fact that infants and children eat and drink more relative to their size than adults. And they do not account for the additive effects of pesticide exposure from sources such as contaminated tap water used to reconstitute infant formula or juice, or home and garden use of pesticides.

Pesticides are commonly found in baby food consumed by infants in the first year of life. The levels detected are typically well below federal standards, but federal pesticide standards do not specifically incorporate any special protections for infants or young children. The toxicological significance of these residues is not known, but is cause for concern.

Fruits contained more pesticides and at higher levels than vegetables. Five different pesticides were found in pears, four in applesauce, and three in peaches, plums, and green beans.

Iprodione (Rovral), classified by the EPA as a probable human carcinogen, was found more often and at higher levels than any other pesticide detected, even though it was found only in peaches and plums.

Multiple pesticides were found in all fruits and two of the vegetables tested. Two pesticides were found in one third of the peach and applesauce samples. Forty four percent of green bean samples contained two or more pesticides and one green bean sample had three pesticides.

In contrast, mixed garden vegetables or the pea/carrot combination had no detectable pesticides at all, while sweet potatoes contained one pesticide, which was found in six of nine samples. All of these results were quite similar to those reported by FDA for the years 1985 through 1991.

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