

Ottawa to test for toxic dust in daycares ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Dust is more than just dirt and skin flakes and the federal government wants to know whether it could be exposing young children to harmful chemicals as they crawl through their days.

Health Canada is looking for scientists to collect and analyze dust at hundreds of daycares to look for the residue of potentially dangerous substances used in everyday items such as plastic toys, cleaning solutions and vinyl flooring.

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Health Canada is conducting a separate but similar study of dust in Canadian households, but said it is ordering this investigation because there is a lack of sufficient data on the levels of toxins young kids are exposed to on a daily basis.

"Daycare time can represent a substantial portion of the day for some small children and it is important to consider all potential exposures," departmental spokesman Philippe Laroche wrote in an email Monday. "This study will provide valuable information about such exposures and will allow a more accurate estimation of risk."

The three-year study will cost up to \$300,000 and involves sampling the dust at 300 randomly chosen daycares in urban Ontario and Quebec and testing indoor air for particulates at 30 randomly selected child-care centres.

Health Canada says the study will target toxins the federal government considers priorities for regulation because they are harmful to human health or the environment.

These include bisphenol-A, banned in baby bottles but still found in hard plastics and the lining of canned food, and perfluorinated chemicals used in some non-stick cookware and furniture polish.

Other priority chemicals to be measured include non-brominated flame retardants used in some sealants and caulking, phthalates found in some soft plastic toys and vinyl flooring, pesticides, as well as antibacterial, preservative and scent-producing chemicals found in household cleaning products.

"These are all very nasty chemicals or those that have a big question mark hanging over them in terms of how toxic they are," said Kathy Cooper, a researcher with the Canadian Environmental Law Association. "They are found in very, very small levels, but they are definitely found."

Laboratory studies have shown these chemicals cause negative health effects, such as disrupting the endocrine system. They have been linked to early puberty, stunted growth and obesity

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/health> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-development> [5]

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