
Environmental Toxins Found in Newborns' Blood

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A new study released Thursday questions the long-held belief that fetuses in the womb are largely protected from dangerous chemicals pregnant women are exposed to.

Laboratory tests of the umbilical cord blood of 10 newborns found that the samples contained an average of 200 chemicals that can cause cancer, brain damage, birth defects and other health ailments, according to the study sponsored by the Environmental Working Group.

"This is conclusive evidence that babies are being exposed to hundreds of industrial chemicals throughout pregnancy," said Sonya Lunder, an EWG scientist in Oakland who is five months pregnant. "The placenta isn't a magic shield."

'Should Not Be Cause for Alarm'

Lunder and other health advocates spoke Thursday at a news conference in San Francisco, where they called on California lawmakers to pass legislation that would require the state to collect data on chemicals found in people's blood.

The American Chemistry Council, which represents major US chemical companies, argued that chemicals are often found in people's blood or urine in amounts that do not cause or increase risks for disease.

"The measurements by themselves are not an indication of a risk to health and should not be cause for alarm," the council said in a statement.

For the study, the Environmental Working Group commissioned independent lab tests on ten random samples, provided by the American Red Cross, of umbilical cord blood from babies born in US hospitals in August and September last year.

Need for Biomonitoring

The lab tests tested for 413 chemicals and detected 287 in the samples. Of the contaminants detected, 180 can cause cancer in humans and animals, 217 are known to be dangerous to the nervous system and brain and 208 can cause birth defects in animals, according the EWG study.

Health advocates said the study underscored the need to pass legislation that would create the country's first statewide "biomonitoring" program to measure chemical contaminants in people. Backers say the program will generate data to help state officials better protect people from toxic chemicals.(c) Daily Breeze

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