



SAFER FOOD PACKAGING: PVC/PHTHALATES



WHAT IS POLYVINYL CHLORIDE (PVC)?

Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) is a synthetic plastic polymer used in a variety of products, including food packaging. Phthalates are often added to PVC products to increase flexibility. The chlorine from PVC contributes to the development of dioxins (it is a by-product). Dioxins are released during the manufacture, burning, and land filling of vinyl chloride. Phthalates and dioxins are known toxicants. There are currently no federal regulations pertaining to the use of PVC in food packaging.

WHAT ARE PHTHALATES?

Phthalates are a class of chemicals that are often added to plastics to make them softer or more flexible. Because of their adverse health impacts and widespread use, certain phthalates (8 in total) were banned by the Consumer Product Safety Commission for use in “childcare articles.” Alternative phthalates have been developed, however, given that these new chemicals have similar properties to the banned chemicals, scientists believe they will likely prove to be just as unsafe as the original, banned phthalates.



WHAT HEALTH RISKS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH PVC, DIOXINS, AND PHTHALATES?

Vinyl chloride, a chemical used in the manufacturing of PVC, can damage the central nervous system and has been associated with liver damage and cancer.

Dioxins, are suspected to be endocrine disruptors and may cause developmental and reproductive problems.

Phthalates are hormone-disrupting chemicals that interfere with testosterone, causing infertility and developmental abnormalities in the male reproductive system. Phthalates have also been linked to obesity, preterm birth and low birth weight, worsening of asthma, and behavioral issues in young children. Since manufacturers are not required to list phthalates on product labels, there is no way to tell if a food's packaging contains these chemicals.



HOW CAN I REDUCE EXPOSURE TO PVC/PHTHALATES IN FOOD PACKAGING?

- Avoid items with recycle codes 3, 6 or 7.
- Never heat or microwave food or drink in any plastic container, even if the product says "microwavable" or "microwave safe"
- Use PVC-free plastic wrap (buy plastic wrap and bags made with polyethylene)
- Opt for glass or porcelain food and drink containers whenever possible.
- Stainless steel drinking containers are ok for use with water.
- Discard all worn or scratched plastic food containers, especially baby bottles, sippy cups and infant feeding plates and cups
- Take food out of its plastic containers and grease-resistant wrappers as soon as possible.
- Bring your own cups, dishes, and utensils to eat and drink with at cafes and restaurants that use disposable items. You can also bring your own storage containers for any leftovers.



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