

Environmental contaminants

PCBs

Environmental contaminants can affect any community. They are chemicals found in the environment in amounts higher than what would be there naturally. They come from industrial or commercial sources and can be in the things that people are in contact with everyday like soil, water, and air.

Polychlorinated biphenyls — PCBs

PCBs are a mixture of several man-made organic chemicals. They were often used in electrical transformers, plasticizers, paint additives, adhesives, inks and carbonless paper, lubricants, and hydraulic fluids. PCBs were banned in 1977 because evidence showed that they could build up in the environment and may harm human health.

Small amounts of PCBs can be found in almost all outdoor and indoor air, soil, sediments, surface water, and animals. They build up in the food chain and are stored in fat tissue. The major dietary source of PCBs for people is fish, but PCBs are also found in meat and dairy products.

Exposure to contaminants

Direct exposure to contaminants can occur by eating, breathing in, or contact with the skin. Potential health effects from contaminant exposure depend on several things:

- The **type** of contaminant (examples: PCBs, dioxin, lead, arsenic.).
- **How long** a person is exposed to the contaminant.
- **How much** of the contaminant a person is exposed to.
- **How a person is exposed** to the contaminant (breathing in, eating, or skin contact).
- **Site conditions** where the contaminant is found and how people use that site (example: surface sediment in a recreational area compared to sediments under water, or covered by pavement).
- A **person's size and current health condition** may influence the potential health effect from contaminant exposure.

Minimize your exposure

It's a good idea to avoid or reduce your exposure to contaminants. Here are some simple steps you can take to minimize your risk of exposure:

- Clean frequently to reduce dust and residue inside buildings.
- Use a wet or damp cloth or mop to clean surfaces.
- Use vacuums with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.
- Do not sweep with dry brooms; avoid using dusters.
- Wash children's hands with soap and water often, particularly before eating.
- Wash children's toys often.
- Wash hands with soap and water after cleaning, and before eating or drinking.
- Remove shoes before entering your home to avoid tracking soil into your house.



Have additional health questions? Contact Washington State Department of Health, toll-free 1-877-485-7316.