

Ban urged for chemical in plastic baby bottles: Minnesota lawmakers cite tests that raise concerns about potential health effects [Pioneer Press, St. Paul, Minn.]

Feb. 8--Minnesota lawmakers want to ban a plastics chemical from baby bottles after reviewing product tests that show potentially harmful levels can leach from bottles after they are washed and heated.

The test results, released Thursday by environmental groups in several states, involved bottles made by four well-known manufacturers and sold at large retail chains. After being heated, the bottles released levels of bisphenol-A that some researchers view as harmful.

The study adds to the growing public debate over BPA, which is found in 95 percent of the bottles on the market. The debate has already caused many parents to act despite a muddled and conflicting collection of scientific opinions.

At high enough quantities, BPA can disrupt hormone function and lead to certain cancers, reproductive problems and other health issues, said Dr. David Wallinga, director of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy in Minneapolis.

"BPA is a hormone wrecker," he said.

Nineteen bottles were purchased randomly in Canada and the U.S. -- including one at a Target in Roseville -- and then tested by a consortium of environmental groups. BPA levels ranged from 5 to 8 parts per billion after the bottles were heated, which is well below the federal safety standard, but well above the levels that some animal research has suggested is harmful.

Public attention increased late last year when a federal panel of experts reported "some concern" that low level exposure to BPA could have

neural and behavioral effects in children. However, the panel also found "minimal" or "negligible" levels of concern about other supposed health effects.

The American Council for Science and Health offered its own three-year-old report on BPA Thursday as evidence that a ban isn't needed. The council found the public consumption far below the levels of BPA that are toxic.

"There is no reason to throw out the baby bottles with the bath water," said Dr. Gil Ross of the council, which accepts support from companies and corporate foundations. The council frequently challenges claims of unsafe products -- with tobacco being an exception.

Sen. Sandy Rummel, DFL-White Bear Lake, and Rep. Karen Clark, DFL-Minneapolis, said the potential risk to children is too great to ignore.

They have authored the Healthy Children's Product Legislation that would phase out BPA from products for children younger than 3. The bill would also phase out the use of phthalates, another plastics chemical that has drawn controversy.

Consumers don't have to wait for the legislation. Public concern has driven increasing sales of baby bottles made of glass or BPA-free plastic. Target started selling these alternatives this month and the Babies "R" Us chain carries them as well. Whole Foods only stocks BPA-free bottles.

The bottles containing BPA are usually marked with a "7" plastics label.

Busy parents shouldn't have to do the research to protect their children, said Lindsay Dahl of Healthy Legacy, the local environmental group that released the BPA study results.

Carron Perry, of the Minnesota Public Interest Research Group, said it was alarming to learn she had given bottles containing the chemical to her two children.

"You know, you're just trying your best to be a good parent and raise a healthy kid," said Perry, holding her 21-month-old daughter Ivy. "It's like you're blindsided out of nowhere."

A ban on BPA bottles would come with a cost. Diapers.com lists the cost of a 9-ounce bottle from Avent -- one of the companies that uses BPA -- at \$4.49. A BPA-free bottle from Born Free is listed at \$10.99.

Clark said a ban in Minnesota and other states would broaden the market for BPA-free bottles and bring the prices down. Lawmakers also noted the potential cost savings of preventing health problems by reducing chemical exposure.

The tests involved bottles with the Avent, Dr. Brown, Evenflo and Disney/First Years labels. The bottles were heated to 176 degrees, which is hotter than a typical dishwasher cycle but is intended to simulate the effect of numerous washings.

BPA is also used in can liners, water bottles, dental fillings and other products.

Jeremy Olson can be reached at jolson@pioneerpress.com or 651-228-5583.

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