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## Earth Day 2005: Chemical Kids

Children, who are more susceptible to the effects of environmental toxins, are being exposed to increasing chemical dangers present in everyday life.

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APRIL 20, 2005 -- This morning, did you brush your teeth, use mouthwash, shower, shave, wash and style your hair, and apply body lotion and lip balm? If so, you probably used about nine personal care products containing a total of 126 unique chemical ingredients.

At least, this is the case for the average adult, according to a study conducted last year by the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

Their "[Skin Deep](#)" study, which examined the safety of 10,500 ingredients found in more than 7,500 personal care products, found that many of these chemicals can pose significant health hazards to you and your family.

Researchers found that nearly 70 percent of all products evaluated contain ingredients that can be contaminated with impurities linked to cancer and other health problems, including more than 80 percent of all lip balms and baby bath products. Additionally, they found that one-third of all products contain one or more ingredients classified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other governmental agencies as possible human carcinogens.

Some of these ingredients are particularly worrisome because they are considered to be human reproductive and developmental toxins which may disrupt hormone levels in men and women, impair fertility, and alter the development of a fetus or child. Among the list are compounds such as phthalates, toluene, lead acetate, ethoxyethanol acetate, alkylphenols, and parabens.

These chemicals are used in a variety of products, including those designed for babies and children such as lotions, washes, nail polishes and lip balms. In fact, the EWG found that phthalates are used in an estimated three quarters of all personal care products, and nearly 58 percent contain parabens.

While there isn't any definite link demonstrating that personal care products may cause cancer, the potential effects from the chemicals in them are part of a

larger realm of environmental hazards that we are exposed to on a daily basis, including household cleansers, pesticides, solvents, plastics, ultraviolet radiation, and air and water pollution.

Children are particularly sensitive to these hazards. According to the National Academy of Sciences, children's developing organs are less able to detoxify and excrete chemicals, and their overall exposure is greater than that for adults. Children eat more food, drink more water, and breathe more air than adults in relation to their body size, all of which are potential sources of contamination.

The EPA has determined that children ages two to 15 are three times more vulnerable to carcinogens than adults. This vulnerability may be a contributing factor to the disturbing rise over the past 20 years in certain cancers in young adults, including leukemia, brain and liver cancer, testicular cancer, lymphoma, thyroid cancer and others.

Because they are more susceptible to the effects of environmental toxins, children need greater protection from exposure. This is a cornerstone of this year's April 22 Earth Day theme, "Protect Our Children and Our Future," which strives to bring global attention to the impact the environment has on our children's health.

According to the Earth Day Network, more than 40 percent of children in the United States under the age of five suffer from diseases which can be attributed to environmental risk factors.

Asthma rates in the U.S., for example, have doubled over the past 10 years, which may be a result of increased exposure to pollution, chemicals, allergens, and cigarette smoke. The World Health Organization estimates that, worldwide, approximately three million children under the age of five die every year as a result of environmental hazards.

What can you do to embrace this year's Earth Day theme and make a difference? Explore the Environmental Working Group's [interactive product guide](#) to find the risk of the personal care products your family uses, and find safer alternatives. To reduce your [household chemical exposure](#), consult the handy guide to safer household chemical alternatives, offered by Denver Recycles.

The health of the environment is a responsibility we all share. Get involved – there are several ways that you can participate in [individual and citywide Earth Day activities](#) that directly have a positive impact on Denver's local environment. Celebrate Earth Day every day, and help protect your health, the health of your family, and improve the health of our shared global environment.

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