



Comprehensive Review of Pesticide Research Confirms Dangers *Family doctors highlight link between pesticide exposure and serious illnesses and disease; children particularly vulnerable.*

Toronto, ON – April 23, 2004 – The Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP) is strongly recommending that people reduce their exposure to pesticides wherever possible after releasing a comprehensive review of research on the effects of pesticides on human health. Released today, the review shows consistent links to serious illnesses such as cancer, reproductive problems and neurological diseases, among others. The study also shows that children are particularly vulnerable to pesticides.

The review found consistent evidence of the health risks to patients with exposure to pesticides. “Many of the health problems linked with pesticide use are serious and difficult to treat – so we are advocating reducing exposure to pesticides and prevention of harm as the best approach”, said Dr. Margaret Sanborn of McMaster University, one of the review’s authors.

Principle Findings of the Review:

- Many studies reviewed by the Ontario College show positive associations between solid tumours and pesticide exposure, including **brain cancer, prostate cancer, kidney cancer and pancreatic cancer, among others.**
- Previous studies have pointed to certain pesticides, such as 2,4-D and related pesticides, as possible precipitants of **non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma (NHL)**, and the findings of the College’s review are clearly consistent with this.
- It is clear from the review that an association exists between pesticide exposure and **leukemia**. According to the College, the implication of pesticides in the development of leukemia warrants further investigation and also, political action.
- The review team uncovered a remarkable consistency of findings of **nervous system effects** of pesticide exposures.
- Occupational exposure to agricultural chemicals may be associated with adverse reproductive effects including: **birth defects, fetal death and intrauterine growth retardation.**

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Pesticide Effects and Children:

Children are constantly exposed to low levels of pesticides in their food and environment, yet there have been few studies on the long-term effects of these exposures. Nevertheless, the College reviewed several studies that found associations between pesticide exposures and cancer in children. Key findings include:

- An elevated risk of **kidney cancer** was associated with paternal pesticide exposure through agriculture, and four studies found associations with **brain cancer**.
- Several studies in the review implicate pesticides as a cause of **hematologic tumours** in children, including **non-Hodgkin's lymphoma** and **leukemia**.
- Some children have overall **increased risk of acute leukemia** if exposed to pesticides in utero or during childhood, especially for exposure to insecticides and herbicides used on lawns, fruit trees and gardens, and for indoor control of insects.

What the Public Should Do:

Given the wide range of commonly used home and garden products associated with health effects, the College's overall message to patients is to **avoid exposure to all pesticides whenever and wherever possible**. This includes reducing both occupational exposures, as well as lower level exposures that occur from the use of pesticides in homes, gardens and public green space. The College also advocates exposure reduction techniques such as:

- Researching and implementing alternative organic methods of lawn and garden care and indoor pest control.
- Proper use of personal protection equipment, including respirators for home and occupational exposures.
- Education on safe handling, mixing, storage and application when pesticide use is considered necessary.

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What Family Physicians Should Do:

In the wake of this systemic review, the College is advocating that family physicians take the following measures:

- Screen patients for pesticides exposure at a level that may cause significant health problems, and intervene if necessary.
- Take patient pesticide exposure history when non-specific symptoms are present – such as fatigue, dizziness, low energy, rashes, weaknesses, sleep problems, anxiety, depression.
- Focus efforts on prevention rather than on researching the causes of chronic or terminal disease.
- Consider high-risk groups (e.g. children, pregnant women, seniors) in their practices.
- Advocate reduction or pesticide risk/use to individual patients.
- Advocate reduction of pesticide risk/use in the community, schools, hospitals and to governments.

The Ontario College of Family Physicians is a provincial chapter of the College of Family Physicians of Canada and is a voluntary, not-for-profit association that promotes family medicine in Ontario through leadership, education and advocacy. The OCFP represents more than 6,700 family physicians providing care for remote, rural, suburban, urban and inner-city populations in Ontario. The OCFP is the voice of family medicine in Ontario. At the heart of the organization is the building and maintenance of high standards of practice and the continuous improvement of access to quality family practice services for all residents of Ontario.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: The OCFP Study is available on the Ontario College's website at www.ocfp.on.ca

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