

Industrial chemicals hurt developing brain

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U.S. scientists say chemical pollution may have injured the brains of millions of children.

Although it's known that fetal and early childhood exposures to industrial chemicals can lead to neurodevelopmental disorders, there has been insufficient research to identify the individual chemicals that can cause injury to the developing brains of children.

"The human brain is a precious and vulnerable organ," said Philippe Grandjean, adjunct professor at the Harvard School of Public Health and lead author of the study. "And because optimal brain function depends on the integrity of the organ, even limited damage may have serious consequences."

Grandjean and co-author Philip Landrigan, a Mount Sinai School of Medicine professor, believe industrial chemicals have caused a silent pandemic that's caused impaired brain development in millions of children worldwide. They note virtually all children born in industrialized nations from 1960-80 were exposed to lead from gasoline, which may have reduced IQ scores above 130 by more than half and increased the number of scores less than 70.

"We must make protection of the young brain a paramount goal of public health protection," said Grandjean. "You have only one chance to develop a brain."

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