

Scientists to EPA: Include women in reproductive health research

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A team of Northwestern University scientists will meet with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrators in Washington D.C. Oct. 18 to advocate for important changes in the agency's guidelines for reproductive health research.

"The problem is current research assessing the risk of toxins on reproductive health is not being uniformly investigated in both sexes and across the [lifespan](#)," said Kate Timmerman, program director of the Oncofertility Consortium of Northwestern University, who will be one of the scientists meeting with the EPA. The reproductive health guidelines have not been updated since 1996 and need to be revised to reflect new research findings.

The Northwestern team will ask the EPA to expand the definition of reproductive health beyond pregnancy to include the lifespan of an individual.

"Reproductive health is important across the entire lifespan because your [endocrine system](#) affects your [bone health](#), [cardiovascular health](#) and other systems in the body," Timmerman said. Endocrine disruptors, sometimes triggered by [environmental factors](#), can lead to increased risk for stroke and heart attack as well as osteoporosis.

The Northwestern scientists also will request that all EPA-sponsored research require appropriate testing in both sexes. Currently many toxicity studies are only conducted in male animal models with the

assumption that females are affected the same way, but that isn't necessarily true.

"What happens now is if researchers don't see an effect in males, they won't look in females," Timmerman said. "But we know certain toxins in the environment can have a significant effect on females and not males and vice versa."

Timmerman and colleagues will present a white paper to the EPA on how to improve and update the guidelines. View the white paper at: <http://www.woodrufflab.org/sites/default/files/EPAWhitePaper.pdf>

In addition to Timmerman, other Northwestern scientists meeting with the EPA include Kimberly Gray, professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern's McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science; Mary Ellen Pavone, M.D., assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine and a physician at Northwestern Memorial Hospital; and Francesca Duncan, reproductive scientist/research associate in the lab of Teresa Woodruff, chief of fertility preservation at the Feinberg School and director of the Oncofertility Consortium.

Provided by Northwestern University

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