

## Plastic chemical may expose foetuses to cancer (Update)

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France said Tuesday it would call for Europe-wide controls on a paper product containing bisphenol A after a watchdog agency said the widely-used chemical may expose unborn children to breast cancer later in life.

Bisphenol A, or BPA, is a common component of plastic bottles and the linings of food cans, but some studies have linked it to brain and nervous system problems, reproductive disorders and obesity.

It has been banned for use in baby bottles by the European Union, United States and Canada.

France's ANSES food safety agency urged pregnant women to avoid food preserved in lined cans, or drinking water from polycarbonate water fountains found in many office buildings which it said was a "source of exposure to bisphenol A".

It also advised them to avoid handling slips from shop tills, and urged further research into the risk of exposure for cashiers.

The agency said bisphenol A could pose health risks to unborn children if their mothers ingested, inhaled or repeatedly touched products that contain it—including thermal paper used in some kinds of cash register slips or ATM receipts.

Bisphenol is also commonly found on CDs and DVDs and plastic containers used for microwave cooking or fridge storage.

Ecology and Energy Minister Delphine Batho said that on the basis of the ANSES report, France would recommend that the European Commission ban the use of bisphenol A in thermal paper receipts.

"Until then, it is imperative that manufacturers prioritise the search for a substitute for this substance," she said in a statement.

In a report summarising several global scientific studies on the topic up to July 2012, ANSES said its experts were "moderately" confident of the evidence pointing to a risk to babies in the womb, though the danger for other people remained unclear.

"The conclusions show that certain exposure of pregnant women to BPA poses a risk for the mammary glands of the unborn child," the agency said in a report that wrapped up a three-year investigation.

The risk "may be characterised... by increased sensitivity of the mammary gland to the formation of tumours. The risk potentially concerns both sexes," said the report.

There was also a possible risk for the foetus' brain, metabolism and reproductive system, it added.

ANSES stressed there were still many uncertainties in the data.

Advised by agencies like ANSES, the French parliament in December voted to ban BPA in baby food packaging from 2013 and in all food containers from 2015.

The chemical is still used around the world in plastic products, and the United States said last year it would not impose a general ban of BPA as there was no evidence of harm to adults.

In February, a report on an analysis of 150 scientific studies said bisphenol A may be used in quantities too small to affect human health.

ANSES cautioned against replacing bisphenol A with a substitute from the same chemical family, saying not enough was known about other bisphenols like M, S, B, AP, AF, F and BADGE.

"These substances share a chemical structure," the agency pointed out.

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