

Study finds pesticide levels in Australian breast milk lowest in world

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Credit: University of Western Australia

Researchers at The University of Western Australia and Murdoch University have found that levels of pesticides in breast milk have dropped significantly during the past 40 years.

The research, published in the international journal *Chemosphere*, was led by UWA's internationally renowned human lactation researcher Emeritus Professor Peter Hartmann, Dr Donna Geddes and Murdoch's Associate Professor Robert Trengove.

Professor Hartmann, a senior research fellow with UWA's School of Chemistry and Biochemistry, said the research revealed there had been a 42-fold decrease in levels of pesticides detected in [breast milk](#) since the

1970s.

He said the research demonstrated the effectiveness of State Government legislation to prohibit such pesticides in WA, leading to the decrease of human exposure to them over time.

Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) include [organochlorine pesticides](#), organophosphate pesticides, pyrethroids and carbamate pesticides, which were widely used in agricultural practice to kill pests.

The study recruited 40 West Australian breastfeeding mothers who had an average age of 33 years and found the daily intake of POPs by infants was at least 59-fold below recommended guidelines, indicating that WA infants were not at risk from pesticides in their mother's milk.

The levels observed in the study were also among the lowest reported in Australia and worldwide.

Professor Hartmann said breastfeeding mothers should feel reassured by the findings and not be concerned about [pesticides](#) passing through their milk to their babies.

More information: Jian Du et al. Pesticides in human milk of Western Australian women and their influence on infant growth outcomes: A cross-sectional study, *Chemosphere* (2017). DOI: [10.1016/j.chemosphere.2016.10.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chemosphere.2016.10.005)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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