

French watchdog sounds alert over chemicals in diapers

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A French public health watchdog warned Wednesday about the risks of several chemicals found in disposable nappies, leading the government to demand that manufacturers withdraw them from their products.

The Anses health body stressed there was no medical study which had proved health problems caused by disposable diapers.

But "we cannot exclude a risk... because we have recorded some substances that are above healthy limits," the deputy director of the Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety (Anses), Gerard Lasfargues, told AFP.

The chemicals identified in the study—described as the first of its kind—include two artificial perfumes as well as other complex aromatic products that are refined from oil, and potentially dangerous dioxins.

The investigation by Anses came after a report in January 2017 from French consumer magazine 60 Millions de Consommateurs (60 Million Consumers) which sounded the alarm about chemicals in diapers.

The magazine reported that toxic chemicals had been found in the majority of the 12 brands tested, including glyphosate which is used in weedkiller and is feared to be cancerous.

The French government called a meeting of nappy manufacturers on Wednesday morning and gave them 15 days to present a plan to withdraw the products identified by the watchdog.

"I want to reassure parents: Anses says that there is no immediate risk for the health of our children," Health Minister Agnes Buzyn said after the meeting.

"Obviously we should continue putting nappies on our babies. We've been doing that for at least 50 years," she said, while adding that the report did not exclude "a health risk for children in the long term".

"That's why, as a precaution, we want to protect our children from

possible effects," said Buzyn, who met the manufacturers along with the economy and environmental ministers.

She said that she wanted companies to stop using the chemicals within the next six months at most.

In a statement on Wednesday, market leader Pampers, which belongs to US consumer products group Procter & Gamble, said its diapers "are safe and have always been so".

A group representing French manufacturers, Group'hygiene, also issued a statement to "reassure parents", saying they could continue using disposable nappies "in complete safety".

Scientists working for Anses tested 23 types of nappies in real-life conditions as they were worn by children, which it said was a world first.

"We calculated the amount (of chemicals) absorbed, calculated according to the time a nappy is worn, the number of nappies worn by babies, up to 36 months, and then we compared the results with toxicology standards," Lasfargues said.

An average baby in France wears 3,800 to 4,800 nappies, Lasfargues said, with the potentially hazardous chemicals found even in products marketed as environmentally friendly.

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