

Secrecy at Canada's pest management agency must end, say researchers

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Health Canada increased maximum residue limits for glyphosate in some crops, such as oats and beans, in 2021 despite concerns about the health impact of glyphosate-based herbicides (GBHs). The World Health Organization's (WHO) International Agency for Research on Cancer regards these pesticides as genotoxic, meaning they can damage DNA

and are likely carcinogenic.

"Health Canada's PMRA considers pesticide sales and risk evaluation data in Canada to be confidential business information, and independent researchers cannot access these data, even through the 'Access to Information Act.' Such a level of secrecy contrasts with important steps taken by Health Canada to improve transparency of data about therapeutic products," say Drs. Marc-André Gagnon, an associate professor at the School of Public Policy and Administration at Carleton University (Ottawa), and Marie-Hélène Bacon from the Collectif de recherche écosanté sur les [pesticides](#), les politiques et les alternatives (CREPPA) at Université du Québec à Montréal (Montréal).

"Time to improve transparency at Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency" was [published](#) in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*.

The authors point out that federal ministers of health have discretionary powers to share confidential business information on therapeutic products, granted in 2014 with the passing of 'Vanessa's Law.' They argue that these discretionary powers should be extended to pesticides if there is a risk to [human health](#).

"This ongoing culture of secrecy at Health Canada's PMRA is deeply concerning. Health ministers should use their discretionary powers to ensure that safety data for pesticides stop being concealed as [confidential business information], as is the case for therapeutic products. By restraining access to evidence and by imposing secrecy, Health Canada impedes constructive public debates over important scientific and [health issues](#) related to pesticides, which nurtures the idea that governmental institutions are influenced by the agrochemical industry," the authors conclude.

More information: Marc-André Gagnon and Marie-Hélène Bacon, Time to improve transparency at Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2023). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.231089](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.231089)

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