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Paraben Preservatives in Body Care Products Threaten Children's Health

>From The Independent (UK)

Children at risk from cosmetics

By Severin Carrell

May 30, 2004

Children are at greater risk of cancers and fertility problems in later life because of the growing use of their cosmetics and toiletries, health experts are warning.

Adolescents and the parents of young children are buying more beauty products made for adults and toiletries such as baby wipes and bubble baths than ever before.

Fertility experts, cancer specialists and environmentalists are becoming alarmed by evidence that most of these products use potentially dangerous chemicals linked to breast cancer, falling sperm counts and hormonal damage.

The World Health Organisation and European health and environment ministers are to issue a stark warning next month. Ministers from all 25 EU member states, including the Environment minister Alun Michael and Health minister Melanie Johnson from the UK, will sign a declaration calling for action to cut children's exposure to these chemicals.

Their warnings will be backed by initiatives by Friends of the Earth and the Women's Environmental Network.

A report by Friends of the Earth this week will accuse the UK's largest retailers of failing to take effective action to cut down on these chemicals in their products.

The ingredients of greatest concern include chemicals called parabens which can affect the hormone oestrogen and were recently found in breast cancer tissues. They are routinely used as preservatives in body lotions such as Johnson's "baby softwash" and Kandoo toilet wipes.

Other suspect additives are known as phthalates, used to soften plastics and help carry scents in cosmetics. Banned for use in baby toys, they are linked to lower sperm levels in men, premature breast development and allergies.

Cosmetics companies such as Boots and Johnson & Johnson insisted all their

products were very carefully formulated within strict health guidelines. But the Cosmetics, Toiletries and Perfumes Association admitted it was likely to phase out the use of all phthalates because of consumer concerns.

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