

Concerns over baby bottles

- Reporter: Helen Wellings
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Our Food Authority said it is safe but many experts here and overseas believe a chemical found in baby bottles should be banned.

The chemical has been pronounced dangerous by many scientific reports and it is linked to deadly diseases and has been banned in other countries.

Bisphenol A, or BPA, is a chemical in many everyday food and water containers.

It is used in the manufacture of brittle plastic polycarbonates for many brands of baby bottles and sippy cups, water dispensers, plastic tableware, food storage containers and it is in aluminum cans for beer, mixers and soft drinks.

Reports say Bisphenol A is an endocrine disrupting chemical which mimics the sex hormone oestrogen.

It is linked to infertility; problems with reproductive development, neural and behavioural development in foetuses, infants and children, early puberty in girls, obesity, breast and prostate cancer, diabetes, thyroid malfunction and attention disorders.

Taking safety precautions, Denmark, Canada, and some US states have banned BPA in baby bottles or have legislation pending.

Six of the biggest baby bottle manufacturers in the US have agreed not to use the chemical and large retailers like Walmart will not sell BPA products.

In Australia, Bisphenol A is freely allowed.

Dr Rye Senjen from Friends of the Earth warns scientists the world over have proven the chemical leaches into food and drink.

A Harvard study found people who drank from bottles containing BPA had a 69 per cent increase of BPA in their urine.

"When you open tins up you see a white lining, that is Bisphenol A contained in the epoxy resin," Dr Senjen said.

"Every time you put in food and water from these containers, a tiny tiny bit of bisphenol leaches out into the food and when we eat the food it enters our body."

Food Standards Australia and New Zealand's Chief Scientist, Dr Paul Brent, said overseas food regulators found BPA at safe levels and that the bans are just a precaution.

"We're not in the position to ban anything because the levels that we are being exposed to in our view, based on the weight of scientific opinion and evidence, is that they are safe," he said.

"It's got some toxic effects at very high levels according to the studies done in animals but the levels the human population is being exposed to across the board, that includes vulnerable groups like babies who are bottle fed, the risk is very, very low."

Nadia Duensing has been dubbed Australia's Erin Brockovich for her one-woman crusade to save babies from Bisphenol A in polycarbonate plastic milk bottles.

"It's been a big issue in America and Canada where it's been on the news for years," she said.

"I'm very proud to be called a crusader, each time I see a baby being fed from a clear polycarbonate baby bottle my heart races."

Nadia said when the chemical use was banned in Canada some of the major baby bottles manufacturers brought in their own BPA-free baby bottles but they didn't send them to Australia.

"Australian mothers haven't got an alternative so I did a lot of research, I found out the best plastic to get and I brought it into Australia," she said.

While our health regulator does not see the need to ban BPA, there is no way of knowing which plastic bottles have the chemical because manufacturers are not required to disclose the type of plastic on the label.