

## News Release

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**UMass. LOWELL REPORT:  
TOXIC CHEMICALS CAN CAUSE CHILDHOOD CANCER;  
NEW DATA ON CHILDHOOD CANCER RATES IN MA**

(Boston, MA) The Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow and the Boston University School of Public Health announce new report findings that chemicals, such as pesticides, solvents, petrochemicals and industry byproducts can cause childhood cancer. The Lowell Center for Sustainable Production report also found higher rates of cancer among African American and Latino children in Massachusetts.

“From the accumulating evidence, the picture is becoming clear that some chemicals in our environment, food, and products we use everyday can cause childhood cancer,” said Joel Tickner, ScD who co-authored “Toxic Chemicals and Childhood Cancer: A review of the evidence,” at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. “This evidence is strongest linking pesticide and solvent exposures to leukemia, brain and central nervous system cancers.”

“A panel of experts recently concluded that genetic predisposition accounts for no more than 20 percent of all childhood cancers and that environmental causes could account for 5–90 percent, depending on the type of cancer,” said Richard Clapp, professor of environmental health at the BU’s School of Public Health. “The good news is that these high rates of childhood cancer are not inevitable, and that we can prevent childhood cancer by removing toxic chemicals and other environmental hazards.”

The report, based on examination of the published literature on epidemiologic studies, animal toxicologic data and other peer-reviewed sources, found evidence that:

- 1. Children have an increased likelihood of certain types of cancer if they or their parents have been exposed to pesticides and solvents. One study found that children were 11 times as likely to develop brain cancer if their mothers were exposed to pesticide sprays or foggers during pregnancy.*
- 2. Children whose parents are exposed to petroleum-based products or combustion by-products such as dioxins and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons have an increased likelihood of leukemia, and possibly brain and central nervous system cancers. A study found that*

children of parents exposed to petroleum products in their jobs were 2.4 times as likely to develop acute non-lymphocytic leukemia.

*3. Children can face an increased likelihood of cancer if they or their parents were exposed to these chemicals prior to conception, in the womb, or in early childhood. One study found that children of fathers who worked with benzene or alcohols used in industry prior to pregnancy were nearly 6 times as likely to develop leukemia*

*4. African American and Latino children in Massachusetts had approximately 25% more diagnosed cancers than white, Asian and Pacific Islander children.*

*5. In Massachusetts, approximately 2,688 children ages 0-19 were diagnosed with cancer and 394 died from 1990 – 1999.*

“The pain the whole family suffers when your child is diagnosed with cancer is unimaginable,” said Kathy Barry, spokesperson for concerned Citizens Network of Wilmington. “We must take every step to better protect our children and prevent this tragedy where possible.”

“That communities of color are exposed to so many toxic chemicals in their communities is a terrible injustice which must be stopped,” said Ali Noorani, Director of Public Health, Health Services Partnership of Dorchester. “It is unacceptable that young children of color should bear the burden of the toxic exposures which lead to cancer.”

“It is very likely that children’s cells are particularly susceptible to the effects of environmental agents,” said Sarah Vargas, MD, pediatric pathologist at the Children’s Hospital. “As a practicing pathologist involved in the diagnosis of benign and malignant childhood tumors virtually daily, I hope to raise awareness about this important issue.”

“The Brain Tumor Society, a national organization committed to finding a cure for brain tumors and helping to improve the quality of life for brain tumor patients, survivors and families, supports the effort to probe epidemiological evidence that may determine potential causes of childhood brain tumors, the leading cause of solid tumor cancer death,” said Neil P. Levitan, Executive Director, of the Brain Tumor Society.

The Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, a coalition of 110 health, community, labor, scientific and environmental groups, commissioned the report to educate the public on the extreme importance of reducing toxic chemicals as a means to prevent growing chronic diseases. The coalition is pressing lawmakers to pass legislation that would launch a program to require that toxic chemicals be replaced by safer alternatives wherever possible.

“No one should bear the tragedy of childhood cancer unnecessarily,” concluded Deborah Forter, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition. “We must replace toxic chemicals with feasible safer alternatives.”