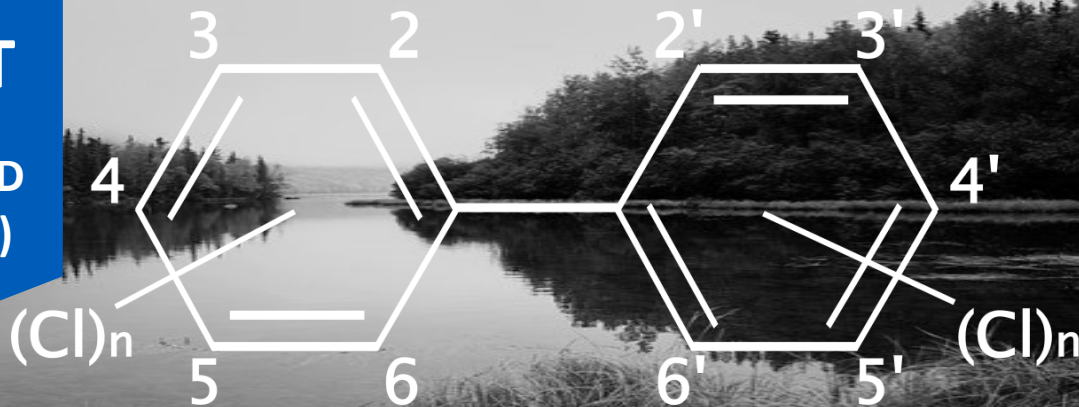


FACT SHEET

POLYCHLORINATED BIPHENYLS (PCBs)



What are Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)?

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are a group of man-made organic chemicals. PCB's have no known color or odor. Companies manufactured PCBs from 1929 until the United States banned them in 1979. Many industrial and commercial applications used PCBs. PCBs can cause harm to humans and wildlife.

How do PCBs enter our environment?

Hazardous waste sites, illegal or improper disposal of industrial wastes can release PCBs into the environment. This includes leaks from old electrical transformers and burning of some types of waste in incinerators. PCBs do not break down once in the environment. They can remain for long periods cycling between air, water and soil.

How are people exposed to PCBs?

You can come into contact with PCBs through contaminated soil or sediment. Young children are at the greatest risk. They often play in dirt and place their hands and other dirty objects in their mouths.

PCBs are often present at hazardous waste sites. Exposure can happen if you breath air and drink contaminated well water near these sites.

If you work repairing or maintain PCB transformers, you may risk exposure. Exposure can also happen with old electrical devices and disposal of PCB materials.

You can also be exposed by eating fish contaminated with PCBs.

How will being exposed to PCBs effect my health?

Common effects include:

- Acne
- Rashes

Less common effects include liver damage, indicated in a change to blood and urine.

Pregnant women who were exposed had babies with lower birth weight, lessened motor skills and decreased immune systems.

How can I reduce my exposure to PCBs?

Children should not play or eat in the dirt near hazardous waste sites. They should not put dirty hands, toys, or other objects in their mouths. In addition, children should not to play with old appliances, electrical equipment, and transformers, since they all may contain PCBs.

Everyone should wash their hands frequently.

Is there a medical test to show if someone has been exposed to PCBs?

There are tests to measure levels of PCBs in your blood, body fat, and breast milk, but these are not routinely done. These tests cannot determine when were exposed or whether you will develop health effects.

Where can I get more information about PCBs?

Contact DSHS Health Assessment and Toxicology:

- 1-800-588-1248
- epitox@dshs.texas.gov
- dshs.texas.gov/epitox/hat.shtm

