

The Choice Is Yours

It's Up To You

Every day you make choices that affect your health. Since there appears to be a relationship between pesticides and lymphoma, then this risk factor may be partially under your control. You can choose whether to make an effort to reduce your exposure to pesticides.

When U.S. Surgeon General Luther Terry first announced in 1964 that smoking causes lung cancer, his statement was considered controversial. There wasn't scientific consensus on the issue — many studies showed a strong link between lung cancer and cigarettes, while others did not. During the decades that followed, evidence that cigarette smoke is carcinogenic mounted slowly and is now overwhelming. Today, though tobacco companies continue to argue otherwise, most people believe that cigarette smoking is a major cause of disease and death.

What can we learn from this? Since it may take years to establish with some certainty whether pesticides cause lymphoma and other cancers, what are we, as lymphoma patients, friends, and family members, to do?

How important is it, really, to have a "perfect lawn"?

A sensible approach is to follow "the precautionary principle," a concept defined and developed in 1998 by an international group of scientists and environmental activists. This principle, meant to apply to public policy as well as to individual choices, reads in part:

"When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically."

Since we see from the studies in this Research Report that there is some evidence that links pesticides to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, it makes sense for us to reduce our exposure to pesticides.

You have an opportunity to make a conscious choice in balancing the risks of pesticides against their possible benefits. How important is it, really, to have a "perfect lawn?" Do the ants that invade your kitchen each spring pose any danger, or are they just plain annoying? Is there really a danger of contracting Lyme disease in that weedy patch in the back of your property

(and if so, might it be better to mow the patch than to spray it with pesticides)? Would the manager of your apartment building, condo maintenance service, office building, or hotel/ motel consider reducing or eliminating their spraying schedules if you mention your concerns?

In the next few pages, we offer you some ideas to help you reduce your own and your family's exposure to pesticides.

What About Drinking Water?

You may be drinking a daily dose of pesticides without knowing it, even if you get your water from a city, town, or suburban water system. A report in USA Today (October 21, 1998) stated, "Powerful new pollutants imperil drinking water supply...from heartier bacteria to increasingly toxic industrial pollutants, pesticides, and fertilizers."

While federal regulations require water system operators to test for more than 80 substances, the rules are not enforced in many communities, and pesticide residues do appear in tap water. To learn more about the drinking water in your locality, you can call the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1 (800) 426-4791.

If you have a well on your property, its water, like that supplied by public water systems, may be contaminated by pesticides from nearby farms, lawns and gardens. The U.S. Department of the Interior states in its recent report, *The Quality of Our Nation's Waters* (p. 6): "At least one pesticide was found...in more than one-half of shallow wells sampled in agricultural and urban areas. Moreover, individual pesticides seldom occurred alone."

You might consider having your well water tested by a private laboratory, though this is expensive. An alternative is to use tap water for washing, and bottled or filtered water for drinking. Use caution, however — some brands of bottled water are not pure spring water, but city tap water placed into bottles. Look for the source of the water — it's printed on the label.

What About DDT?

DDT, a very toxic pesticide, was banned in the U.S. in 1970. Twenty-five years later in 1995, researchers were still able to find it in the fatty tissues and blood of nearly 100% of humans. So, we are all internally exposed to small amounts of DDT in addition to everything else we use, consume, or breathe. We — all people who live in industrialized nations — have dioxin and other chemical residues in our bodies. It's possible that this chemical insult to our immune systems is a partial or contributing cause for the epidemic of lymphoma that we see today.

Common Ways You Are Exposed to Pesticides in Daily Life

Home pest control

Do you use products in your home to kill fleas, cockroaches, ants, earwigs, flies, wasps, bees, termites, carpenter ants, silverfish, or spiders?

Exterminators

Have you hired an exterminator to rid your house of pests? Has your home been treated for termites or carpenter ants?

Apartments

Do you live in an apartment that is sprayed with pesticides by the building management?

Condo

Do you live in a condominium where the grounds are maintained by a landscaping service that uses weed killers and insect killers?

Garden

Do you use insect killers or weed killers in your garden? Do you plant tulip or daffodil bulbs with your bare hands? (Most floral bulbs have been drenched with fungicides before being sold.)

Lawn care

Do you use lawn fertilizers that have weed killers (which are herbicides) to get rid of crabgrass and other weeds? Have you hired a lawn service to keep your yard and lawn free of weeds and insects? Do you allow children or pets to play in pesticide-treated grass?

Do Pesticides Cause Lymphoma?



Neighbors

Do your neighbors spray their shrubs, trees, or lawns?
(Sprays allow pesticides to drift beyond property lines.)

Workplace

Is your workplace treated with pesticides? (Many managers of office buildings and public buildings hire commercial exterminators to spray at regular intervals.)

Public areas

Do you use a park, golf course, playing field, or other public area? (Many parks and public areas, and virtually all golf courses, are treated with weed killers and/or insecticides. So are the green spaces near roads and highways.)

Drinking water

Do you drink water from a private well or public source that contains pesticides? (Don't assume that your city tap water is free of pesticides).

Hotels and motels

Do you stay in hotels or motels? (Most hotels and motels regularly spray the rooms with pesticides.

Certain foods

Do you eat fish caught in lakes (such as the Great Lakes) or streams that are contaminated with pesticides?

How Can I Minimize My Exposure to Pesticides?

10 Easy Steps To Take

- 1 To get rid of weeds in your lawn or garden, don't spray them — pull or dig them up, or leave them alone. Tolerate some weeds in your lawn — after all, they are green, like grass.
- 2 Keep your use of indoor pesticides — such as insect sprays and pest strips — to a minimum, eliminate them altogether, or use less toxic pesticides such as pyrethrins and boric acid.
- 3 If your workplace is sprayed with pesticides, find out whether your office or workspace can be spared this treatment. Often, there are no insects in office areas, especially if food is not stored or eaten there.
- 4 Try to avoid lawn fertilizers or treatments that contain pesticides. If you're not sure whether they contain pesticides, call the store where you bought them, or call the manufacturer (many stores are not familiar with all the pesticides and chemicals they sell).
- 5 If you hire a lawn care company, ask them not to use any pesticides. Even if you hire a “natural” lawn care company, check on all substances they plan to apply to your property. If the product kills weeds or insects, it's a pesticide.

Do Pesticides Cause Lymphoma?

- 6 If you live in an area where the local water supply is contaminated by farm runoff (this includes much of the Midwest, parts of California, and some other areas), consider drinking filtered or bottled water rather than city tap water or local well water. Be careful: not all filters effectively remove pesticides, and not all bottled water is free of chemical contamination. (Ask your dentist about possible fluoride needs, especially for children.)
- 7 Buy organically grown fruits and vegetables from a store you can trust. Look for the organic label. If you can't buy organic food, wash and/or peel fruits and vegetables. These fruits and vegetables are thought to have the highest pesticide residues: apples, grapes, green beans, peaches, pears, strawberries, spinach, and winter squash (squashes like butternut, acorn, spaghetti, pumpkin, golden). But continue eating lots of fruits and vegetables!
- 8 In animals and humans, pesticide residues concentrate in fat. If you do eat dairy products, use the low-fat kinds. (It is thought that young children may benefit from consuming some fat in their diet. Check with your pediatrician.)
- 9 Reduce your consumption of animal fat, which contains more pesticide residue than the muscle (meat) portions. Remove as much fat as possible from meat and poultry before cooking.
- 10 Don't eat fish caught in ponds, lakes, or rivers that are contaminated with runoff water from nearby farms.