

Union of Concerned Scientists

Science for a Healthy Planet and Safer World

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How do Common Chemicals Harm Children? The EPA Now Refuses to Fund the Science



What happened: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has decided to not renew funding for 13 research centers that study the associations between chemical exposures in early childhood and later adverse health outcomes. The environmental health studies have been going on for two decades across the country and the loss of EPA funds is significant and potentially devastating to the centers. While the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) partially funds the program, NIEHS has said that it will be unable to make up for the shortfall of funding caused by the EPA's withdrawal of grant support. Researchers fear that when the EPA funding dries up in July 2019, they won't be able to keep up the decades-long prospective studies on children's health.

Why it matters: The work conducted by the NIEHS/EPA Children's Centers has had an incredible impact on our understanding of children's health, leading to 2500 publications in scientific journals

since 1999. Some research examples from these centers include: how a policy to phase-out flame-retardant chemicals led to a decrease in the level of these chemicals in children; how smoking bans in public areas decreased passive smoking exposure for pregnant women; and, how ambient air pollution can impact DNA in ways that can contribute to asthma. These data are rare, high-quality, and extremely valuable as they can reveal associations between environmental exposures early in life and health problems later in life. Data from the research centers have been used by governmental agencies to set health-based policies to protect the health of children. For instance, Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health's study on hundreds of children in New York City has shown strong evidence that the pesticide chlorpyrifos harms children's brain, and it is a highly referenced study to support a ban on chlorpyrifos – the study factored into Hawaii's decision to ban chlorpyrifos. However, the EPA under the Trump administration has repeatedly questioned the [science of chlorpyrifos](#) and the Columbia study is one of the primary targets for the [EPA's restricting science rule](#). As recently as October 2018, the EPA praised the work coming the 13 research centers. The loss of these incredible studies is a serious setback to the field of children's health and will ensure that the some of the best and most comprehensive research on children's health will not be available to help in creating policies that protect the health and safety our children from the dangers of exposure to certain chemicals.

Learn more about how the [EPA defunded these important children's health centers](#), likely imperiling important research on how early childhood exposures to chemicals can lead to adverse health outcomes later in life.

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