



BP Oil Spill: Keeping Kids Safe!

A message for communities, schools, parents, teachers, and child/youth organizations:

Children are NOT immune to the effects of the oil catastrophe and its pollutants. In fact, children are more likely to have serious health problems from crude oil spills than the adults around them. Children breathe more air per pound of body weight, and they can absorb more through their skin than adults. Older children and young adults are also susceptible to oil spill toxins and are more likely to ignore health advisories and regulations about beach closings or decontamination. Parents and other adults should be alert to children who live, learn, and play near contaminated areas who have new or worsening health symptoms, and have them evaluated by a doctor or health clinic for possible exposures.

Children's Exposure and Health Effects

The air: Crude oil contains very toxic chemicals that evaporate into the air and blow across land and water. You can smell them. Inhaling crude oil fumes can cause difficulty breathing, headaches, dizziness, nausea and confusion. Even a brief exposure can cause problems for kids and adults with asthma or other breathing problems.

Direct contact: Children may come into direct contact with crude oil contaminants in the form of "weathered" oil or "mousse" and tar balls on the beach or in the water. They can irritate and damage skin. Children also very quickly and easily absorb toxins through their skin. Some may swallow crude oil residues or oil slick by accident playing in the sand or water, or transfer toxins from their hands to the foods they eat.



Symptoms of recent oil and fume exposure in children



Increase in breathing problems or asthma attacks



Headaches and dizziness, confusion, nausea, vomiting



Skin irritation and rashes

If your child/student has these symptoms, make sure you reach a health clinic or doctor.

from The Institute of Medicine workshop: "Assessing the Human Health Effects of the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill"

Tips for Keeping Kids Safe



Children should NOT be on clean-up crews; pregnant women should not be on clean-up crews without carefully discussing this with their health provider.



Parents on clean-up crews should leave the toxics at work; they should not bring oily clothes or shoes into the house.



If your child has played on a beach with tar balls or gone swimming in oily water, clean skin thoroughly with plain soap and water. Do not use gasoline or turpentine. Do not use closed or fouled beaches. Follow public health advisories.



If your child has new or worsening health symptoms such as nausea, headaches, or dizziness, go to a health care clinic or doctor. Make sure they shower with soap and water and change into clean clothes. Remain indoors in air-conditioned rooms and stay away from contaminated beaches.



*****Staying away is the best way to keep you and your children from getting sick. Avoid exposure to air, water, mist, dust, sand and anything else that may be contaminated with crude oil.*****

Children are exposed to oil spill contaminants that have serious, long-term health effects

Some of the *major* oil spill contaminants and their health effects are listed below. Please check the CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (ATSDR) for more information on each of these toxic substances and how they affect our health (www.atsdr.cdc.gov/substances/index.asp) and the New Jersey Dept of Health's Right to Know Hazardous Substances Fact Sheets (web.doh.state.nj.us/rtkhsfs/indexfs.aspx?lan=english) Also see the Oil Spill Contaminants Resource and Information Guide on Healthy Schools Network's Special Gulf Oil Spill Edition of *NewsSlice* for more details.



VOC Volatile Organic Compounds evaporate and become chemical fumes, including benzene, ethyl benzene, toluene, and xylene. These can cause many health problems such as headaches, nausea, and long term effects such as cancer
www.epa.gov/bpspill/vocs.html



Benzene is a type of VOC made from the burning of natural products such as coal and petroleum. Recent and acute exposure can cause any of the symptoms listed in the previous section. Long term exposure to benzene can disrupt normal blood production, leading to anemia, and excessive bleeding. Too much exposure to benzene can also be harmful to the immune system.



Hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) occurs naturally in crude petroleum. Exposure to low concentrations of hydrogen sulfide may cause irritation to the eyes, nose, or throat. It may also cause difficulty in breathing. Brief exposures to very high concentrations can cause a loss of consciousness and possibly death. In most cases, the person appears to regain consciousness without other effects. However, there can be permanent or long-term effects such as headaches, poor attention span, poor memory, and poor muscle control.



Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are a group of over 100 different chemicals that are formed by the incomplete burning of coal, oil and gas. EPA has identified seven different PAHs as probable cancer-causers. PAHs have also been linked to birth defects and problems like low IQs.



Dispersants are sprayed onto crude oil to speed its break up. Corexit has been used in the Gulf Oil Spill. It contains 2-butoxyethanol, petroleum distillates and other potentially harmful chemicals, including heavy metals. Preliminary EPA studies indicate it may hurt red blood cells, the kidneys and the liver, may irritate eyes and skin.



PM (Particulate Matter) Burning oil results in small air borne particles that can cause health problems for clean-up workers and area residents. Small particles can be inhaled deeply into lungs and even enter the bloodstream. People with respiratory or heart disease (such as asthma or congestive heart failure), children, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable. Particulates can make the air seem smoky or hazy but may also be present at hazardous levels even when the air appears clear.

Resources for More Information

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) Assessing the Human Health Effects of the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill - www.iom.edu/Activities/PublicHealth/OilSpillHealth.aspx

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Children & Disasters
AAP Information on the Oil Spill Affecting the Gulf Coast - www.aap.org/disasters/oil-spill.cfm

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Gulf Oil Spill 2010: Information for Parents - http://emergency.cdc.gov/gulfoilspill2010/info_for_parents.asp

Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units
PEHSU Information on Gulf Coast Oil Spill - www.aoc.org/PEHSU/documents/gulf_spill_7-1-2010.pdf

State of New Jersey Dept of Health
Right to Know Hazardous Substance List - <http://web.doh.state.nj.us/rtkhsfs/rtkhsl.aspx>



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Healthy Schools Network (HSN) is a national children's environmental health advocacy organization that does research, provides information, education and coalition-building to ensure that every child has a healthy learning environment. Healthy School's previous work on Children and Disasters include "Schools of Ground Zero", co-published with the American Public Health Association, which documented the lack of any agency advisories or actions for school children post-9/11 in New York City. Healthy Schools also tracked the lack of child health advisories post-Hurricane Katrina in 2005.