

## Tips for a Healthy Yard

Playing outside is a fun and healthy choice. Making a safe yard or play area, or taking outings to a park or playground are great ways to spend active time with children.

Many chemicals used in the yard have been identified as neurotoxins (harmful to the brain or nervous system), or endocrine disruptors (interfere with the hormone system).<sup>1</sup> A child's brain and hormonal system are still developing through adolescence and are at risk from the effects of these chemicals.<sup>2</sup>

There is much that is unknown about the role of environmental contaminants in many serious health conditions. Research is ongoing to explore these links. There is enough evidence to recommend avoiding children's exposure to toxins whenever possible. The following suggestions can help you keep toxins out of your yard.

### Playsets and Picnics

If you use a wooden play structure, deck, or picnic table built before 2004 it may be made of pressure-treated wood that contains arsenic (called "CCA-treated"). Just touching the CCA-treated wood is not a significant health hazard; ingesting it is the concern. Since children frequently put their hands in their mouths they may ingest arsenic after touching CCA-treated wood.

- Always wash hands with soap and water before eating and after playing
- Keep the soil around and under the playset covered with 6-9 inches of woodchips or pea-gravel.
- Use a tablecloth on picnic tables made with CCA-treated wood.

### Cover Bare Dirt

Past activities may have left toxins such as lead, arsenic or pesticides in the dirt. Keeping the dirt covered helps protect children.

- Place a thick layer (six to nine inches) of woodchips or pea-gravel under playsets.
- In play areas, plant bare soil with grass, or cover with clean sand, pea-gravel, or wood chips.
- Add compost to garden areas.



### Avoid Bug and Weed Killers – including “Weed and Feed” Fertilizers

Studies show higher levels of pesticides in the blood and urine of children whose families use weed or bug killers.<sup>3</sup> There are non-toxic solutions to most weed and pest problems, even yellow jackets. Call the Thurston County Common Sense Gardening Program (360) 867-2674.

## **Favorite “Soccer Border” Plants**

Plants sturdy enough to withstand a stray ball or game of hide and seek.

### **Shrubs**

- Forsythia
- Lilac
- Nandina
- Salal
- Mature blueberries

### **Perennials**

- Sage
- Sword fern
- Thyme
- Alyssum
- Creeping phlox

## **Watch Out – Poisonous Plants**

Teach children to always check with an adult before eating berries or plants. The following is a partial list of common poisonous plants. Keep the Washington Poison Center phone number handy: 1-800-222-1222.

- Foxglove (digitalis)
- Nightshade
- English ivy
- Rhododendron
- Azalea
- Cotoneaster berry
- English holly
- Elderberry
- Morning glory
- Larkspur
- Laurel

## **If Renting, Request 24-hour Notice Before Weed or Bug Killers Are Used**

- Remove toys from the area. Indoors, cover dishes and food.
- Keep your family away while pesticides are applied and as long as possible afterwards.
- Ask for a copy of the MSDS and pesticide label to learn the specific ingredients and safety precautions required.

## **Wipe Your Feet, Wash Your Hands**

When you come inside, make these two healthy habits part of your routine. First, remove shoes when coming inside to keep dirt and any germs, lead, arsenic, or pesticides sticking to the dirt stopped at the door. It will help keep your house cleaner also! Then head to the sink to wash hands with soap and warm water.

## **For More Information**

For more information, contact Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, Environmental Health Division at 360-867-2674 (TDD line 360-867-2603) or visit our website at [www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehkids/index/html](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehkids/index/html)

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<sup>1</sup> Basrur SV. Lawn and Garden Pesticides: A Review of Human Exposure & Health Effects Research. Toronto Public Health April 2002.

<sup>2</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Environmental Health. Etzel RA, ed. Pediatric Environmental Health 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. American Academy of Pediatrics 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Lu C, Knutson DE, Fisker-Andersen J, Fenske RA. Biological Monitoring Survey of Organophosphorus Pesticide Exposure among Preschool Children in the Seattle Metropolitan Area. Environ Health Perspect 108:299-303 (2001)

