

KIDS' GUIDE TO PESTICIDES

A FACTSHEET FROM SAFER PEST CONTROL PROJECT



What are pesticides?

Pesticides are chemicals made to kill pests. They come in many forms: liquids for spraying, gels for putting into cracks and crevices, pellets that pests can eat or that will dissolve over time. There are many different brands and types of pesticides (*can you name some?*) but most fall into one of these three categories:

- ➔ **insecticides** — insect killers
- ➔ **herbicides** — plant killers
- ➔ **fungicides** — mold/fungus killers

All pesticides are poisons designed to kill something.

What are pests?

Pests are plants, insects, or even animals that people consider dangerous, ugly, or inconvenient. (*Can you think of an insect or a animal that someone you know calls a pest?*) In homes and schools many people think cockroaches, ants, and mice are pests. Outdoors, especially in yards, some people think dandelions and clover are pests. And some people don't want rabbits eating their garden plants and so consider rabbits pests. Some bugs, like mosquitoes, can bite people



and sometimes—rarely—a bug or animal can carry a disease. Pests are not often dangerous to people and, if you think about it, most bugs, plants and animals are not pests.

Are pesticides dangerous?

Pesticides can be very dangerous to people—especially kids—and especially when they are not used properly. If someone wants to apply a pesticide in a public place, like a school or park, they have to have a special license or work with someone who does.

Can pesticides hurt people or pets?

Yes, especially when sprayed in the air, used too often, or in places where people or pets are often playing, sleeping, or eating. If you get pesticides on your skin, they can make you dizzy, shaky, tired, or sick to your stomach. Breathing too much of the fumes, too often, can make kids, pets, older folks, and sometimes even healthy adults sick. Some pesticides can build up in a human or animal body over time and can lead to more serious health problems.

People started depending on pesticides about 50 years ago. At first, scientists, farmers, and everyone else thought they were shortcuts to getting rid of many pest problems and that



they couldn't hurt people or animals. But now we know that there are many risks to using pesticides. Pesticides can pollute our drinking water, lakes, and streams. In big enough amounts, they can poison pets, wildlife, birds, good insects (the kind that eat pest insects), and people.

All of these are reasons why we should avoid using pesticides whenever possible. There are many simple, less

dangerous ways to control pests. In any situation where a pest seems to be out of control, people should look for solutions that won't hurt plants, useful insects, birds, pets, or people, and won't pollute our water or the air we breathe.



What Can Kids Do About Pesticides?

1 Never, ever play with pesticides or even with empty pesticide containers. If there are pesticides in your home (like bug killers or weed killers) ask your parents to put them out of reach of younger children—like your younger brothers, sisters, and cousins.

Tell your parents what you learned today—that there are safe ways to control pests that don't use pesticides and that pesticides can hurt birds, pets, and people even if used properly. If they have questions, they can get free information from the Safer Pest Control Project at 312/641.5575 or online at spcpweb.org.

3 Offer to help pull weeds by hand at home. Help plant a garden that will provide a good place to live for beneficial bugs like ladybugs, dragonflies, and green lacewings.

Give your parents a hand in the kitchen. **4**

5 Never play in a yard that has just been sprayed with pesticides. Yards that have just been sprayed will have small white 'danger' signs in them.

Learn about bugs and plants and animals and how we all fit together in our world. **6**

Safer Pest Control Project is dedicated to reducing the health and environmental impacts of pesticides and promoting safer alternatives in Illinois.

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