

**Environmental Health****Paint Linked With Risk Of Cancer And Infertility**


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With the winter showing us the last of its true colours many of us may already be making plans for home renovations and a fresh lick of paint here-and-there around the house. But you may be getting more than you bargained for with your DIY.

The latest studies and evidence suggest a strong link between paint, cancer and infertility. Let's take a closer look.

**What's in your bucket of paint?**

There are numerous hazardous chemicals in conventional paint. Those identified to cause harm are known as 'volatile organic compounds' or VOCs. These VOCs are derived from petrochemicals and readily release vapours (outgassing) at room temperature, which seriously affects indoor air quality. Now, you would think that outgassing only takes place in the first few days after a new paint job but the truth is it can continue for months (sometimes even years) after painting.

Those of us who have painted a room before will know that after being surrounded by the fumes for a day, you feel a bit dizzy and drowsy, perhaps even have a headache. And that is as much as most of us will suffer from exposure to VOC outgassing. But there is a bigger risk. A number of VOCs such as benzene and formaldehyde are known as carcinogens, which are linked to higher rates of cancer in humans.

**A few cases in point**

In 2001 a large-scale study found a significant dose-response relationship between child leukaemia, acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL), and the number of rooms painted in the year before and the year after the child's birth.

Another US study at the University of California reported a significant association between household use of paint and childhood leukaemia. Children specifically exposed to paint in the home had a 65 per cent greater risk of ALL. What's more disturbing is that this study also found that mothers who used paint during either preconception or pregnancy, had a three-time higher risk of having a child with ALL. This study indicates that paint may cause developmental problems for the foetus.

Other studies have found a link between maternal occupation, exposure to paint during pregnancy and childhood leukaemia. In a large case-control study by the US Children's Cancer Group, women who worked with paint or thinners during pregnancy were almost twice as likely to have a child with ALL.

Paint is also linked to an array of other cancers such as liver and stomach cancer. Studies of workers in painting trades and paint-manufacturing industries showed a higher rates of risk of cancer of the bladder, lungs, larynx, pancreas, oral cavity, oesophagus, liver and stomach. It's for this reason that the International Agency for Research of Cancer (IARC) decided to classify paint as an occupationally related cause for cancer.

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**Not just cancer**

Cancer is not the only health risk related to VOCs. A UK study of more than 2000 men found that those regularly exposed to glycol ethers (also a VOC), mostly found in water-soluble paints, were more likely to have low motile-sperm counts. Low motile-sperm count is a significant predictive indicator of infertility.

Men with a particularly high exposure to glycol ethers, such as painters and decorators, had double the risk of abnormal sperm motility. The researchers of this study concluded that these chemicals are definitely hazardous to male fertility.

Shipyard painters exposed to two types of glycol ethers, 2-ethoxyethanol and 2-methoxyethanol,

showed to have lower sperm counts and a higher risk of low semen volume or complete absence of sperm in the semen. Other VOCs that may also have adverse effects on human reproduction are toluene and xylene (aromatic solvents).

In another study conducted at the Universities of Manchester and Sheffield researchers concluded that men who are regularly exposed to glycol ethers are 250 per cent more likely to have a specific sperm abnormality. Findings of this study were published in the journal Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

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*"It is truly refreshing to read a newsletter on the topic of alternative medicine which is scientifically based and reviewed by professionals....." - Robert Sinott*

**Sources:**

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