



Scientists call to a swift evolution of research and public health policies to address the challenge and complexity of Endocrine Disrupters Chemicals (EDCs)

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Health, Endocrine disruptors, Perinatal exposures

On April 10th, a roundtable organized by WECF France gathered a group of scientists who presented high-quality evidence on EDCs adverse health effects. For several decades, EDCs have been known to interfere with the fragile balance of the human body and are now strongly suspected to play a role in the increased incidence of many chronic diseases. The complexity of their mechanisms of action coupled with the broad scope of their health effects challenge long-established toxicology rules and call to a swift evolution of research and public health policies. The speakers particularly underline the need to protect the stage of fetal development: during this critical period, exposures to EDCs and other substances can trigger health consequences later in life and even endanger the health of next generations. Reflecting these concerns, WECF strongly supports measures to substantially reduce the exposure of pregnant women and the developing child to EDCs.

EDCs: an unprecedent public health challenge

“Hormones aspects are critical for life. They are critical for the future of species”. This statement from Dr Shanna H. Swan, a reproductive health specialist from the *Mount Sinai School of Medicine* can let no doubt about the extent and seriousness of the EDCs challenge, which encompasses elements such as low doses effects, multiple routes of exposure and the cocktail (or combined) effect of EDCs.

Epigenetics and the fetal origin of diseases

As underlined by Dr Ernesto Burgio, a pediatrician specialized on epigenetics, the critical steps taking place during the fetal stage of development, such as cells differentiation, makes it a core aspect of EDCs health challenge. During this critical window of development, even exposures to extremely low doses of EDCs can contribute to the emergence of diseases later in life and trigger consequences for the health of next generations, indirectly exposed to the substances.

Early puberty in girls: a picture of a health condition in which EDCs play a role

Scientists now recognize the significant increase in the percentage of girls entering puberty at an earlier age than previously reported. In 1997, a study already made the hypothesis of the role of contamination by pesticides and plastic compounds in this worrying trend. The findings of Pr Charles Sultan, a specialist of pediatric endocrinology, confirm evidence from *in vitro*, *in vivo* and epidemiological studies linking EDCs to an earlier onset of puberty in girls. Moreover, earlier puberty timing can trigger negative social and psychological outcomes.

Precaution and prevention from EDCs health effects: lessons from the DES story

DES (diethylstilbestrol) is generally used as a model to characterize the potential of EDCs health effects: a synthetic estrogen massively given to pregnant women between 1940 and 1970, DES was found to cause a rare vaginal tumor in girls and women exposed *in utero*, known as "DES daughters", and evidence from health effects on the 3rd exposed generation is emerging. But despite clear information challenging its efficiency and a body of evidence documenting its adverse health effects, DES continued to be widely used during a too long period of time (for example in animal foodstuff). Dr Annie J. Sasco, a cancer epidemiologist who presented the DES story during the debates, reminded the urgent need to learn from the DES story and to regulate endocrine disrupter substances and products whose adverse health effects are presently documented.

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