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Federal Government Action Needed Now to Protect Children from Hazardous Chemicals in Consumer Products

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Toronto: A partnership of eleven environmental, public health, medical and child care groups is calling for improvements in the federal government's approach to regulating chemicals in consumer products. Improved regulation is one of three key areas identified in *First Steps in Lifelong Health: A Vision and Strategy for Children's Health and Environment in Canada* <http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/img_upload/13297cd6a147585a24c1c6233d8d96d8/CPCHE_VandS.pdf> . The Vision and Strategy builds upon eight years of research and consultation by the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment (CPCHE).

"Products that we bring into our homes— from toys to furniture to cleaning products and electronics, from pesticides to air fresheners – too often contain substances that do or could disrupt the normal development of the brain and other organs of a fetus or child." says Dr. Lynn Marshall, a physician with the Environmental Health Clinic at Women's College Hospital. "Children are more vulnerable than adults to environmental contaminants because their bodies are undergoing rapid development and their behaviours – such as crawling on the floor and putting things in their mouths – put them in contact with contaminants found in the home, including many that are in ordinary house dust."

Research shows that many of those contaminants come from consumer products. The polybrominated flame retardants found in TVs and computers, the phthalates found in soft vinyl toys and many personal care products, and bisphenol A (BPA), the plastic additive found in the lining of food cans and in many rigid plastic containers, are among the chemicals targeted by CPCHE for urgent action. CPCHE is recommending that the federal government improve its regulation of chemicals and secure the legislative power to issue mandatory recalls of products when problems are discovered.

The partners are also calling on the government to empower parents with information via labeling and other means. "It is unacceptable that children continue to be put at risk from lead found in common consumer products,

such as toys, key chains and costume jewelry,” says Kathleen Cooper, senior researcher with the Canadian Environmental Law Association. “We have known for decades about the serious risk that lead poses to the brain and nervous system, yet the federal government still allows products containing lead to be marketed. If we can’t get it right for lead, what actions can we expect with all the other chemicals that scientists are increasingly linking to health effects?”

There is much to learn about the risks posed by thousands of chemicals that are in commerce today – most of which have not been tested for their potential to adversely affect the developing fetus and child. “But lack of full scientific certainty is no excuse for inaction.” says Barbara McElgunn, Health Policy Advisor with the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. “When it comes to the health and development of children, it is better to be safe than sorry. CPCHE is calling on the federal government to take precautionary action to reduce children’s exposures to chemicals that are known or reasonably suspected to pose health risks.” CPCHE is also calling for more research on how chronic exposure to environmental contaminants may be contributing to worrisome trends in child health in Canada and other industrialized countries, including rising rates of asthma, learning disabilities and other developmental challenges.

CPCHE’s ***First Steps in Lifelong Health*** is a comprehensive blueprint for protecting children’s environmental health in Canada. “The list is long. There is much to do. But the public is increasingly aware of the need to reduce children’s exposures to toxic chemicals, and governments are starting to respond.” says Erica Phipps, Partnership Director for CPCHE. “The CPCHE partners look forward to working with governments and other stakeholders to build on that momentum.”

First Steps in Lifelong Health: A Vision and Strategy for Children’s Health and Environment is available on the CPCHE website, in English <http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/img_upload/13297cd6a147585a24c1c6233d8d96d8/CPCHE_VandS.pdf> and French <http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/img_upload/13297cd6a147585a24c1c6233d8d96d8/CPCHE_VandS_Fr.pdf> , at www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca <<http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/>>

CPCHE will present ***First Steps in Lifelong Health*** to the media in a press conference at 10:00 AM EST, Tuesday, 16 December, at the Ontario College of Family Physicians, 357 Bay Street (mezzanine), Toronto. Refreshments provided.

To mark the occasion of the release of First Steps in Lifelong Health, CPCHE and Pollution Probe will host an **Evening Public Forum** <http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/img_upload/da5694aac8c831af64641cee3a536b6/PublicForum_Invitation_Dec162008.pdf> **(link to invitation and agenda)** on Protecting Our Children from Toxic Chemicals in the Environment and in Consumer Products, Tuesday, 16 December 2008, 7-9 pm, at the Marriott Toronto Downtown Eaton Centre, 525 Bay Street (Yonge and Dundas subway), Toronto.

Distinguished speakers include the Ontario Minister of the Environment, the Director General of Health Canada's Consumer Product Safety Program, and the Editor-in-Chief of Today's Parent <http://www.todaysparent.com/html_new.jsp?content=20081128_123850_14208> magazine. Free admission; no registration required.