

# Common chemical cancer link

## Carcinogen linked to baby bottles, laptops, credit cards

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**E**XPOSURE to a chemical widely used in everyday plastics like baby bottles has been linked to increased breast and prostate cancer risks, early puberty, infertility, brain dysfunction and heart disease.

And recent research indicates that children, from birth to the age of three, may be particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of bisphenol A (BPA). This chemical can be found not only in baby bottles but also in laptops, tin cans, credit cards and even till slips.

The Cancer Association of SA (Cansa) has investigated the carcinogenic, or cancer-causing, effects of BPA and other artificial chemicals. Although opinion is divided, Cansa has accepted that there is a possibility that BPA could cause cancer.

As part of its campaign to create a society free of carcinogens, Cansa has awarded its seal of recognition to products that are free of cancer-causing agents. Baby product manufacturer NUK has been awarded the Cansa seal for its complete range of BPA-free products.

Cansa is also in talks with manufacturers of tin cans containing BPA about the benefits of using alternative materials.

Carl Albrecht, Cansa's head of research, said BPA was a particular concern when used in babies' bottles because it disrupted endocrinal processes. BPA, when leached from the plastic bottle, is absorbed by the baby through the milk. The BPA then attaches itself to oestrogen

receptors in the body, mimicking the hormone. These cell changes could increase the baby's chances of developing cancer later. Heating the bottle releases up to 55 percent more BPA into the baby's milk.

Other side effects included prostate cancer, infertility, diabetes, brain dysfunction, the early onset of puberty and obesity.

"It is therefore advisable to avoid BPA, especially during pregnancy and the early years of the baby's life," Albrecht said.

Although it has yet to be proved in humans, laboratory tests strongly indicate that BPA causes cancer.

Albrecht said children were vulnerable because their brains were still developing and they lacked the enzymes to inactivate BPA.

The decision by a major baby product manufacturer to switch to BPA-free items was a landmark in Cansa's struggle against harmful environmental chemicals. "About 90 percent of cancer is caused by the environment. The genetic predisposition towards cancer is not more than 10 percent," he said.

Cansa chief executive Sue Janse van Rensburg said people needed to make smart choices to avoid the disease.

BPA is found in a range of products, especially plastics made of hard, shatterproof plastic or polycarbonate. These include the resin coating in tin cans, bicycle helmets, car seats, sports equipment and cellphones. In some cases, cash receipts printed with a heat process, such as those produced by ATMs, contained 250 to 1 000 times more BPA than was found in baby bottles.

