

Testimony of Evelin Dacker, MD to the
Oregon Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee
In support of SB478, the Toxic Free Kids Act of 2015

March 1, 2015

Honorable members of the committee:

As a family physician in Salem providing preventative and family medical care from birth into adulthood since 1996, I strongly support SB478, the Toxic Free Kids Act.

Disease prevention is the best strategy for reducing health care costs and improving the quality of life for the families I serve. There are undeniably enormous benefits to be gained from coaching families in diet, exercise and lifestyle habits that promote health. But unless we recognize our societal responsibility to reduce exposure to modifiable risks, including toxic chemicals from everyday products, my patients are fighting an uphill battle against chronic disease.

It is becoming more apparent every day that a wide range of chronic disease arises from environmental exposure during development, acting in a framework of genetic susceptibility. This early-life exposure embeds an adversity in children, so that exposures later in life can contribute to disease initiation, progression and prognosis. Asthma, obesity, neurodevelopmental conditions, cardiovascular disease cancer and diabetes—a wide range of chronic diseases on the rise today include among the risk factors exposure to chemicals in consumer products—a factor that, quite likely, is vastly underestimated.

In simple terms, I see evidence of this phenomenon when I'm working with families. Take diabetes, for example. When parents are managing their own diabetes, it is a priority for them to ensure that their children are eating well, managing their weight and getting regular exercise. But when that growing child develops diabetes at an age much younger than their parents did, it's as if something has flipped the "on" switch. I have to suspect that ubiquitous exposure to toxic chemicals may play a role—and when diabetes proves difficult to manage, I also have to wonder if there are some overlooked environmental factors that are contributing to the progression of the condition.

It's frustrating, as a doctor, to lack the data necessary to confirm my suspicions. When my patients comply with all healthy interventions, and yet continue to get sick, I have no way to find out what range of environmental exposures, and what synergies between those exposures, may be undermining their health. Without better information, there are few interventions I can recommend to reduce exposure.

Requiring manufacturers to report the use of toxic chemicals in consumer products and to replace those chemicals with safer alternatives SB478 is not just about protecting children's health today. It's also about reducing the risk of disease to improve the health and well-being of tomorrow's adults. I respectfully encourage Oregon to pass SB478 into law.

Sincerely,

Evelin R. Dacker MD
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