Cincy girls at high risk for breast cancer

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Posted: 10/31/07

Greater Cincinnati children are showing signs of puberty at younger ages, which may put them at a higher risk for breast cancer in the future, according to a study by the University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

Researchers at the Breast Cancer and the Environment Research Center (BCERC) found that 20 percent of 380 Greater Cincinnati girls ages 6 and 7 are showing signs of puberty.

The study detected endocrine disruptors, which alter normal estrogen production, in blood, urine and other bodily fluid of the girls.

The disruptors are found in many plastics, pesticides such as DDT and heavy metals like cadmium and lead, said Robert Bornschein, director of UC's BCERC.

UC researchers are looking for more than 30 chemicals found in the blood and urine of girls, and are tracking their diets, obesity levels, life stresses, hormone levels and genetic makeup.

"We will attempt to determine if and how these factors lead to early onset of puberty, a known risk factor for later development of breast cancer in adults," Bornschein said.

Common household items, personal care products and cosmetics, such as rubber ducks, nail polish and skin moisturizers also have been identified as playing major roles in the early onset of puberty, Bornschein said.

These household items contain cancer-causing phthalates, which are chemicals used to make plastics soft and flexible. Phthalates were measured in a study of 90 girls ages 7 and 8 from Cincinnati, New York and San Francisco. Of 10 kinds of phthalates studied, nine were present in 94 percent of the study's participants.

"Most of these chemicals are widely distributed throughout the environment and throughout the world," Bornschein said. "These chemicals can be detected in the blood or urine of most people, including newborns and children. They are commonly found in household products and in our food and drinking water."

The study at Cincinnati Children's Medical Center is projected to last at least another three years, according to Bornschein.

The goal of Breast Cancer and the
Environment Research Center is to define causes and prevent breast cancer, Bornschein said.

There are several risk factors for breast cancer: being female, early menarche, late menopause, late first full-term pregnancy, post-menopausal obesity and genetic mutations.

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