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New research links indoor air pollution to autism risks

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By DAVID T. SIMON

Special to The Vindicator

The average American spends approximately 90 percent of his or her time indoors. And while most people are aware that outdoor air pollution can damage their health, many do not know that indoor air pollutants can also do the same. Indeed, studies of human exposure to air pollutants by the Environmental Protection Agency indicate that indoor levels of pollutants may be two to five times — and occasionally more than 100 times — higher than outdoor pollutant levels.

Indoor air pollutants have been ranked among the top five environmental risks to public health. Yet because the problems caused are not always easily recognized or produce immediate impacts on health, the general public continues to assume that our homes, offices, schools, day-care and senior centers are safe. If only they were.

Indoor air pollutants originate from many expected sources, such as tobacco, heating and cooking appliances and fireplaces. These can release harmful combustion by-products such as carbon monoxide and particulate matter directly into the indoor environment.

However, few homeowners realize that the chemicals they use to clean and maintain their home also can be killing them. Cleaning supplies, paints, insecticides and other commonly used products introduce volatile organic compounds directly into the indoor air. Building materials, whether through degrading compounds (such as asbestos fibers released from building insulation) or from new materials, contribute to pollutants in the air.

Even the family's beloved pets and sentimental memorabilia can negatively impact air quality with substances of natural origin such as pet dander and mold.

NEW EVIDENCE

Such environmental factors during a woman's pregnancy have long been suspected to play a role in the well-being of her child. Now scientists are offering proof.

New studies presented at the International Society for Autism Research

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annual conference in Spain back up the notion that environmental factors before birth may play an important role in the development of autism.

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Researchers have previously listed genetics as a contributing factor, but new research shows that up to one-third of all autism cases could be due to an inflammatory illness suffered by the pregnant mother. Immune dysregulation due to environmental factors has been shown to seriously affect the health of the unborn child. For example, a viral infection (the flu) during the first trimester triples the woman's odds of having a child with autism. Additionally, a bacterial infection during the second trimester increases a woman's odds of having a child with autism by 40 percent. If we can reduce a mother's chances of getting ill during her pregnancy, we can significantly encourage fetal brain development.

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This can be done by limiting a mother's exposure to dangerous environmental hazards.

The ISAR studies released at the conference found that pregnant women who were exposed to certain levels of air pollution were more likely to have a child with autism. A higher risk of autism also has been linked to the use of various household insecticides.

Granted, the new research doesn't prove causality, but it certainly shows associations.

And these findings, combined with previous research, provide more evidence that environmental influences in the womb are meaningful in terms of autism risk.

INTERVENTION

"The exciting thing about looking at environment, or environment and genes in conjunction with each other, is this provides the possibility of intervention," explained Irva Hertz- Picciotto, Ph.D., an environmental epidemiologist at the University of California, Davis, who presented the study on insecticides.

Exactly! A 1980 study showed that 1 in about 5,000 children was diagnosed with autism. That number later grew to 1 in 500 and just this year was updated to 1 in 55 — that's one child on every school bus. Why? What is different now from 30 years ago?

Outside of occupational exposure to pollutants, the air quality within a person's home plays the largest role in health and well-being. This becomes especially critical during the months of a woman's pregnancy. This should be a major wake-up call for us as a community.

Good indoor air quality contributes to a favorable learning environment for students, productivity for employees and adds to the sense of comfort, health, and welfare for hospitals, senior-living and child-care occupants. This most recent evidence has us take into consideration the health and mental development of our unborn babies.

Instead of thinking of air quality on a personal level, it is time for a safe and healthy indoor environment to become a community priority.

Simon is president of Smart Environmental Engineering Consulting and Construction LLC of Youngstown.

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Pollution is ubiquitous and hard to control.

I have heard of families whose children showing autism type behaviors if they had moved into a home that was brand new or remodeling had recently been completed. Off gassing of carpeting or paint sure could cause a problem for a developing newborn.

Which brings me to a question why is the harm caused only prenatally? What about after the child is born? Daily exposure to a range of household chemicals and toxins to a delicate brain would cause far greater harm.

There is a push to microscopically focus on genetics and before birth causes. Children are regressing in development and that fact makes health care officials uncomfortable. And not just regressing but falling physically ill.

A few days ago when the new numbers for autism came out (which are actually old numbers based off of children from hand selected states-11 to be exact born in 2002) so 12 year old data drives today's numbers.... 1 in 68 children -and since boys are more susceptible that indicates 1 in 42 boys.

A new study emerged saying study on brains of children with autism who died young indicated deep in the layers of the brain that there were abnormal cells that caused problems with development. One possibility offered that caused this abnormal development was if the mother contracted influenza during pregnancy. What about an influenza vaccine? The push to vaccinate pregnant mother's with the mercury containing flu shot in this country is on the rise. When I was pregnant with my children getting a vaccine during pregnancy wasn't even a consideration. Nor, was taking anti-depressants or most over the counter drugs or having dental procedures. Now, anything seems to go and we wonder why so many kids are neurologically "off".

People should consider multiple causes or contributing factors to our growing autism epidemic. I think Mr. Simon certainly brings a good theory forward as a possible contributing factor. But I would be more concerned of the health of the child directly exposed to the indoor pollution than the mother being exposed during pregnancy. And, the one thing the author doesn't touch upon is the medical issues that children exposed to toxins and heavy metals may experience. The whole body is affected.

John Travolta and his wife Kelly Preston claimed their deceased son Jett suffered from something called Kawasaki disease which is an autoimmune disease that can be brought on by vaccines, or chemical exposures within the home. Jett suffered from seizures that got worse and worse over the course of his life. He sadly died after falling in a hotel bathroom and hitting his head on a bathtub. His parents later said Jett had autism but had suffered with Kawasaki syndrome symptoms.

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2

Children today are being bombarded with viruses, toxins, and heavy metals via their routine childhood vaccinations. These things being injected directly into their bloodstream with multiple vaccines being given at once. Over and over again.

People generally feel vaccines are good. And you can't convince them any differently. I think what people are not understanding is the sheer number of vaccines given today versus when they themselves were getting vaccines as young children. Today's child gets 49 doses of 14 vaccines by the age of six- and 69 doses of 16 vaccines by the age of 18. Never ever has this growing practice been evaluated for safety or efficacy.

When in the real world would a child suffer with Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio, Hib, rotavirus, Hepatitis B and PCV all at the same time? That's what today's kids get at their 2 month well baby check up. And then they come back two months later for 7 more doses, and two months later for 8 more shots, and you can look it all up yourself at the CDC's website. It is overwhelming to consider.

Yes, pollution could definitely be a contributor. But, the injecting of viruses, poisons and toxins under the guise of good medical care is insane. Please educate yourself.

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And it's awfully generous of Mr. de Souza to give Mr. Simon a Special to the Vindicator article. Looking at Mr. Simon's business... I bet he might benefit from people buying into this theory.

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