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Pesticides are intentional poisons. They include weed-killers, bug sprays, and rodent poisons, and more. It should not be surprising that these intentional poisons can have harmful effects on humans as well as the “pests” they are supposed to kill.

Children are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of some chemicals because they are small and their bodies are still growing and developing. Their bodies are also less able to detoxify and excrete certain chemicals. This is one reason why physicians prescribe lower doses of medications for children.

Exposure to pesticides can cause many immediate symptoms such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, sore throats, breathing difficulties, eye irritation, and more. NCAP’s new report also documents that exposure to pesticides in school settings has caused children to suffer serious or even life-threatening conditions, such as a near-fatal acute poisoning, asthma attacks, anaphylactic reactions, and abnormal heart rhythms.

Many commonly used insecticides are nerve poisons. Scientists now know from human and animal studies that exposure to nerve poisons at certain critical stages of development can permanently affect brain development and function. These chemicals can cause behavioral changes, and impair learning ability, motor and mental development, memory, emotion, and even sight and hearing.

Other pesticides, such as many common weed-killers, are known to cause cancer in animal tests. A number of human studies over the past few decades have found links between home and garden pesticide use and elevated rates of several common childhood cancers, including leukemia and brain cancer.

Childhood cancer rates have increased over the past few decades. While we may not understand all of the reasons for this, common sense tells us that we should be take the precautionary approach when it comes to using pesticides around children. It just doesn’t make sense to use these toxic chemicals at school, exposing children and putting them at risk of cancer or other health hazards.

Pesticide use has become far too casual throughout our society, including in our schools. People need to realize that government regulation is not an assurance of safety. Pesticides are dangerous chemicals that too often pose greater risks to children’s health than any harms that the pests themselves might pose. Even in the case of pests that do pose potential health threats, pesticides are more likely to aggravate the problem than to solve it.

Our children deserve the healthiest learning environment. The widespread use of pesticides in and around schools just doesn’t make sense from a health point of view. It is time for schools to institute the precautionary principle, and reduce the potential for children’s exposure by minimizing or eliminating pesticide use.