

Children's Environmental Health Protection

How is the Air Resources Board protecting children's health?

Children can sometimes be more at risk than adults from the harmful health effects of air pollution. Since the early 1990's, the California Air Resources Board (ARB) has made a major commitment to study the impacts of air pollution on children's health, including special studies on air pollution and childhood disease such as asthma. To provide further protection to children, the ARB is implementing a number of new activities to evaluate and reduce those health risks. Recent changes to state law establish specific requirements to examine the impacts of air pollution on children's health. The ARB's efforts to address children's health impacts include:

- Review of Ambient Air Quality Standards
- Additional Air Monitoring
- Identification and Control of Air Toxics

Children and Air Pollution

Children do not react the same to air pollutants as adults. Children:

- Breathe faster;
- Have greater exposure to some air pollutants than do adults; and
- Can be more susceptible to damage to their developing organs and immune systems.

Review of Ambient Air Quality Standards

Ambient air quality standards (standards) are maximum concentrations, or levels, of air pollutants in the air established to prevent adverse health effects of air pollution. Two departments within the California Environmental Protection Agency, the ARB and the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, are together reviewing the current standards to determine if they are sufficient to protect infants and children. The standards that are identified as needing further review will be prioritized for possible revision. The standard with the highest priority will be reviewed and revised, if necessary, before 2003. The rest will be reviewed and revised at the rate of one per year thereafter.

Additional Air Monitoring for Children

The ARB is conducting special studies to determine if the current network established to measure air pollution in California adequately reflects the levels of air pollutants that infants and children are breathing. The law requires the ARB to measure air pollution at six additional communities across the state. Locations are selected where children are typically present, such as schools and daycare centers, and near sources of air pollution, including busy highways and industry. Indoor measurements will also be taken at some of the selected sites. These steps will help ensure that the ARB has the best information to take actions needed to protect children's health.

Toxic Air Pollutants

A list of special toxic air pollutants that may cause increased illness to infants and children will be compiled by July 1, 2001. Once this list of toxic air contaminants is established, the ARB will review the current toxic control measures that reduce emissions of those pollutants to make sure they protect children's health, and revise the measures if needed. If no toxic control measures exist, new ones will be evaluated and adopted.

For more information

Please contact the ARB's Public Information Office at (916) 322-2990, or ARB's web site at arb.ca.gov/ch/programs/programs.htm. You may obtain this document in an alternative format by contacting ARB's ADA Coordinator at (916) 322-4505 (voice); (916) 324-9531 (TDD, Sacramento area only); or (800) 700-8326 (TDD, outside Sacramento).