

Health And Safety Not Guaranteed

Exposing plastics' impact on human health



Plastics and its toxic building blocks have become ubiquitous in our modern world, but their widespread use comes with consequences for human health.

Plastic and human health

From the beginning, fossil fuel and petrochemical companies behind plastic production emit toxins that harm human health.

Communities living near fossil fuel extraction, petrochemical refineries and transport routes and the workers employed in these facilities, face increased risks of respiratory issues and cancer from emissions, fires, and flares: just one example of how the detrimental effects of plastic on human health start long before it is created for human use.



Throughout their use, microplastics and toxic chemicals such as bisphenols (e.g.BPA), phthalates and PFAS leach from plastic. **Humans are exposed to these chemicals and plastic particles through various routes**, including ingestion from food and water sources, inhalation and direct skin contact. These chemicals have been linked to a range of health issues, including hormonal disruptions, reproductive problems, and even certain cancers. The chemicals leached from these plastic particles can disrupt endocrine (hormonal) functions, lead to various types of cancer, impair organ function, and disrupt development in children, right from the embryo stage. **The health impacts of plastic continue after the plastic has been used**, with plastic waste causing harm to people working in or living in the vicinity of waste management infrastructures such as incinerators or of landfills, with toxic dust or fumes inhaled or plastics degrading into the local environment, becoming a forever part of the ecosystem.

The long-term health impacts of plastic pollution remain a growing area of concern, demanding urgent action to mitigate its effects on human well-being. As plastics persist in our bodies and environment, urgent measures are needed to address the health risks associated with their omnipresence in modern life.



What does it mean for Europeans?

Across the EU, people are exposed to plastics, microplastics and associated toxic chemicals on a daily basis. To prevent further harm caused by this plastic pollution, more effort is needed to shift away from reliance on plastic materials. Toxic chemicals must be designed out of plastics and the most 'dirty plastics', such as PVC, need to be banned. The EU chemical legislation REACH needs to be strengthened and the EU must adopt comprehensive restrictions on bisphenols, PFAs and PVC.

Ultimately, the mitigation of plastic pollution's health impacts hinges on curtailing plastic production, especially for superfluous and single-use plastics. This necessitates a shift towards safe reusable packaging systems and more stringent regulation of chemical additives.

Resources to go further

[Health & Toxics toolkit](#) - #BreakFreeFromPlastic Movement (2022)

[Toxic Free Europe petition](#) - WeMove Europe (2024)

[Turning the plastic tide: the chemicals in plastic that put our health at risk](#) - HEAL (2021)

[Chemicals, Health and Plastics](#) - IPEN

[Plastic & Health: the hidden costs of a plastic planet](#) - CIEL (2019)

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