

## Would you give hazardous chemicals to a baby?



**Babies and toddlers should not swallow hazardous chemicals. But they do. Every time they play with a soft PVC toy.**

Chemicals called phthalates (pronounced tha-lates) have been banned from use in all babies toys in 7 European countries, but soft PVC toys containing phthalates remain on sale throughout the UK.

- Soft PVC toys contain phthalates to make them soft. (You can often smell these chemicals, or the vanilla essence used to disguise the smell, when you open the packaging).
- Phthalates leak out of soft PVC toys. This is why vinyl toys often feel slimy or greasy when you unpack them (vinyl is another word for PVC). They leak even more when a child squeezes, sucks, or chews them. Children will swallow some of the chemical if they suck the toy. They will also absorb phthalates through their skin just from holding the toy.
- Even in Britain phthalates are no longer used in teething rings because the European Commission say they “pose a serious risk to human health” and “are released in dangerous quantities” when soft PVC toys are sucked for extended periods. But these dangerous chemicals remain in many other toys that small children will put into their mouths.

### What is Tony Blair doing?

Tony Blair’s Government, after 3 years of pressure from Greenpeace, have finally agreed to a ban on phthalates in a few PVC toys - those that are “intended” for the mouth. This means teething toys.

But children under three years old put all toys in their mouth. It is their way of exploring the world. In fact a Dutch Government study found that young children spend more time sucking toys not “intended” for the mouth than they spend sucking teething toys.

Tony Blair’s Government has recognised that children will swallow phthalates from soft PVC toys but say that the levels are acceptable.

This is morally indefensible. NO level of phthalates is acceptable for a child to swal-

low.

Tony Blair must ban all soft PVC toys now. No amount of a hazardous chemical is safe or "acceptable" for a small child, especially when it is so easily avoided.

## What harm will soft vinyl toys do?

The European Science Committee, after studying all the available evidence, has advised that phthalates are liable to cause liver, kidney and testicular damage. The Chief Inspectorate for Consumer Health Protection of the Netherlands said: "In circles of scientific investigators there is a suspicion that some phthalates interfere with hormones in animals and perhaps in humans as well, possibly leading to abnormalities in the reproductive organs and infertility. ...The RIVM (the National Institute of Public Health of the Netherlands) cannot rule out detrimental effects to the health of babies who have been exposed to phthalates."

## What toys should I avoid?

Most soft PVC toys contain phthalates. A few now contain other softeners, but none of these have been shown to be safe either. Avoid all soft PVC (vinyl) toys. You may need to ask your toy shop what its soft plastic toys are made of, as they are not always labelled. It is not possible to tell vinyl from other plastics just by looking. Or you could give your child a fabric toy instead of a plastic one, or an apple or carrot to chew instead of a plastic teether.

## What you can do

**Influence toy shops** - If you see a toy you think is vinyl ask the shop manager if he or she is aware of the problem. You might want to ask them why they sell soft PVC toys when safe alternatives are available. And why they sell soft PVC toys for children under 3 years old when these are banned in 7 other European countries.

**Exercise consumer power** - If you want to buy a soft plastic toy, particularly one for a very young child, ask the shop manager what it is made of. Put it back if it cannot be guaranteed PVC-free.

**Take political action** - Tony Blair must ban all soft PVC toys - not just teethers. Write and tell him how you feel. Also write to your own MP. The address of Tony Blair and your own MP is: The House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.

**Spread the word** - Make sure your local nursery, playgroup or crèche is aware of the issue. Pass them this leaflet and ask them not to use vinyl toys. Write to the newspapers and magazines you read, raise the issue at work, with your friends, on a local radio phone-in, wherever and whenever you can.

**Send vinyl toys back** - because PVC is an environmental hazard when it is disposed of, it is best not to throw it in the dustbin. NEVER BURN PVC. Instead take, or send it back to the manufacturer or the shop you bought it from. If you're not sure what a toy is made of you can contact the makers (some toys have a

"careline" number or an address on the packaging). This way you will also be letting toy manufacturers know how you feel.

Here are some numbers of retailers, that at the time this pamphlet went to press, continue to sell soft PVC toys.

Early Learning Centre :	01793 831300
Mothercare :	01923 241000
Toys 'R' Us :	01628 414141
Woolworths :	0171 262 1222
Boots :	0115 950 6111
Hamleys :	0171 494 2000
Selfridges :	0171 629 1234

**Vinyl = PVC. Don't buy it.**

Find out more about Greenpeace. Visit [www.greenpeace.org.uk](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk) or email us at [info@uk.greenpeace.org](mailto:info@uk.greenpeace.org)

If you want to become an active supporter of Greenpeace email [Jill.Phillips@uk.greenpeace.org](mailto:Jill.Phillips@uk.greenpeace.org) or phone 0171 865 8174

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