General Information

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Description

A 2015 study shows that the daughters of pregnant women with high levels of DDT in their blood were four times more likely to get breast cancer. DDT was used across the United States to kill mosquitoes until it was banned in 1972.

Keywords

DDT, Breast Cancer, Cancer, Breast, Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, Pesticide, Chemical, Exposure, Expose, Breast Tissue, Blood, Hormones, Cells, Blood Samples, Study, Barbara Cohn, Public Health Institute, Research, Oakland, California, Jenny Singleton, Regina Santella, Columbia University, Environmental Health Services, Chemicals, Danger, Health, Personal Health, Wellness, Public Health

Citation

MLA

DDT Pesticide Exposure Linked to Breast Cancer

CARL QUINTANILLA, anchor:
We're back with a new study linking breast cancer to a pesticide that was once very common. DDT was used throughout the United States until it was banned in 1972. Although it hasn't been used in this country in more than four decades, new research shows that exposure even from a long time ago could be a contributing factor in the development of breast cancer. Here's NBC's Anne Thompson.

ANNE THOMPSON, reporting:
DDT, once hailed as the miracle pesticide.

MAN: Today's target for this B-25 is Rockford, Illinois, a peacetime mission to spread 500 gallons of DDT.

THOMPSON: Liberally sprayed on crops, trees, even inside houses in the 50’s and 60’s, DDT has long been a suspect in the risk of breast cancer. A connection, scientists have been unable to make convincingly until now. A new study shows that the daughters of pregnant women with high levels of DDT in their blood were four times more likely to get breast cancer. Doctor Barbara Cohn who led the study says before they were even born, DDT increased the daughter's risk.

DR. BARBARA COHN (Public Health Institute Senior Research Scientist): It isn't just simply that it changes the level of hormones, but it changes the tissue of the breast itself. The cells that eventually can be the source of cancer.

THOMPSON: The research was done using blood samples more than 50 years old, collected from pregnant women in the Oakland, California area between 1959 and '67 - 9,300 had daughters. One is Jenny Singleton's mom, Bernice. Both had breast cancer, but not the genetic mutation for the disease.

JENNY SINGLETON: It left me with questions about why me.

THOMPSON: Until Doctor Cohn called and asked Jenny about her breast cancer. Now there is another possibility.

SINGLETON: It's an interesting association and it could be a key to unlocking information about why I-- I got breast cancer.
THOMPSON: Information she wants for her daughter Gretta. Though, the U.S. banned DDT in 1972, Doctor Regina Santella of Columbia University School of Public Health calls the study critical because it may show some of the unexplained breast cancer is related to DDT. So this tells us it's not just the exposure to the chemical--

DR. REGINA SANTELLA (Professor of Environmental Health Services): The time.
THOMPSON: --it's the timing.

DR. SANTELLA: The timing. So it's really a combination of many things. What you're exposed to, when you're exposed, and your response to that exposure.
THOMPSON: Looking at chemicals of the past, so women can be vigilant in the future. Anne Thompson, NBC News, New York.