

## Row over 'avoid shower gel' advice to pregnant women



The list of things to avoid was described as 'bamboozling' Chris Downie/Getty Images

---

**Chris Smyth** Health Correspondent

Last updated at 12:01AM, June 5 2013

Pregnant women have been dragged into a row over how to put “safety first” after senior doctors said that they should consider cutting down on make-up and plastic-wrapped food to avoid potential risks to their unborn babies.

The [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists \(RCOG\)](#) says that even though there is no direct evidence of harm from everyday chemical exposure, pregnant women should be told about how they can reduce their exposure by avoiding painting the nursery or buying new cars.

Experts said that the advice could needlessly scare women and distract from much more important health issues, while some mothers said that women would be left “bamboozled”.

In guidance issued today, the college warns that women should be made aware of concerns about chemicals present in food, grooming products and household cleaners. Substances such as phthalates, bisphenol A and PCBs have been linked to a range of pregnancy problems such as premature birth, birth defects and cognitive difficulties.

The evidence is conflicting and unclear, but the RCOG says some women will still be worried and they should put “safety first” and “assume that risk is present even when it may be minimal or eventually proven to be unfounded”. Doctors should raise the issue at routine antenatal visits, RCOG says.

Michelle Bellingham of the University of Glasgow, a co-author of the paper, said: “We’re not saying if you do this you will definitely have an effect, because we don’t know that . . . We could sit and wait for evidence before we do anything, but this is more a proactive way. If it turns out that in 20 years we were wrong, at least [women were] aware, because the only thing you’re going to do is have a positive effect.

“I hear people screaming ‘you can’t wrap yourself up in a bubble’, which I completely understand because this is everyday life. But these are the ways which, if you choose, you can reduce your exposure.”

Tracey Brown, of the campaign group [Sense About Science](#), said that the college was trying pass the buck to parents by avoiding the question of whether women should be concerned in the first place.

“The simple question parents want answered during pregnancy is: ‘Should we be worried?’ ” she said. “What we need is help in navigating these debates about chemicals and pregnancy. Disappointingly, the RCOG report has ducked this. As the report itself shows, there are many unfounded rumours about links between particular substances and pregnancy outcomes. By contrast, we have plenty of evidence that stress is a major risk factor in pregnancy. Researchers and professional bodies should not be adding to it.”

Justine Roberts, CEO of Mumsnet, said: “This latest list of things pregnant women might want to avoid is bamboozling because of the sheer volume of things on it, which in practical terms makes it almost impossible to follow.”

Richard Anderson, chairman of the RCOG scientific advisory committee, said that countries such as Denmark routinely warned women about chemical exposure and that Britain should follow suit.

He admitted that the risk was “small beer in comparison to smoking and alcohol” but added: “We have a series of examples from history where things that were thought to be fine we now know are not fine.”

Janet Fyle, of the [Royal College of Midwives](#), said: “Pregnant women must take this advice with caution and use their common sense and judgment and not be unnecessarily alarmed about using personal care products such as moisturisers, cosmetics and shower gels.”

11 comments

livefyre 



Text

6 people listening



+ Follow		Post comment

Newest | Oldest | Most Recommended



**Eileen Beesley**

6 hours ago

The list is probably sensible for most people to follow. However, if there is doubt about these products it's the industries that should be targeted, with appropriate research backing

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



**Tom Bloomfield**

6 hours ago

Sadly the R.C.O.G. lost the plot ages ago.

1 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



**Stuart**

7 hours ago

Telling quote in this article from one of the authors:

"We could sit and wait for evidence before we do anything, but this is more a proactive way."

Of course, why bother with silly old evidence?

4 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



**Bertie Stogs**

8 hours ago

I think the best advice from Richard Anderson, chairman of the RCOG is "small beer". A *little* alcohol on occasions through pregnancy can sometimes be just the antidote to all the stresses and pains from everything else going on.

2 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



**bill torbitt**

8 hours ago

Life is very toxic and always ends in fatality

4 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



**Bertie Stogs**

6 hours ago

**@bill torbitt** Just another sexually transmitted infection.

1  Recommend Reply**Foreversideways**

8 hours ago

How about doctors get on with treating people instead of pontificating about everything.

3    Recommend Reply**SteveL**

8 hours ago

It still amazes me how much long term toxicity there is in every day products. The aluminium and parabens in deodorants is only the tip of the iceberg if you read up what long term use can potentially do to you. Also the additional oestrogen in most products can be readily seen by studies on fish that not only suffer physical but also behavioural changes from the high levels in many water sources. So it is not only what you eat but what you spray on guys!

3    Recommend Reply**J Brindley**

8 hours ago

This is a better headline than the one in the printed edition! Passing the buck to mothers indeed. Mothers should be responsible for the environment in which they have a healthy pregnancy and baby. You cannot not give advice that might be detrimental to health just because there is a lot of it and it seems impossible to follow. You follow it as best you can.

1  Recommend Reply**Scott McHugh**

9 hours ago

Surely it all makes sense to people? Eat and live healthily when with child. It is not rocket science

2   Recommend Reply**Sid Latimer**

9 hours ago

At least it should save them some money-less for the tax payer to hand out in benefits ?

1  Recommend Reply

Livefyre

