

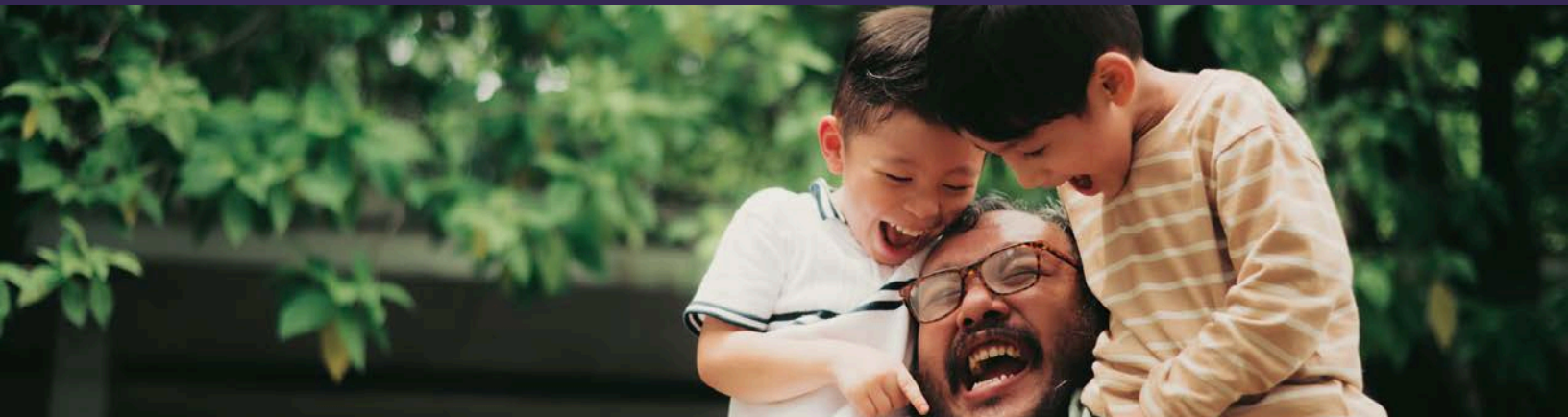
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## **Men's Health and Toxic Exposures**

How toxic chemicals and pollution affect men's long-term health, and why the EPA must reduce risks at the source

**Issue Brief**  
June 2026

# Men's Health and Toxic Exposures



**Men's health is often discussed in terms of diet, exercise, checkups, stress, and family history. Those things matter. But they are not the whole story.**

The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the products we use, and the chemicals we may encounter at work can also affect long term health. Across the country, people are exposed to mixtures of harmful pollution and toxic chemicals through daily life. These exposures do not happen one at a time, and their health effects do not stop at one organ system.

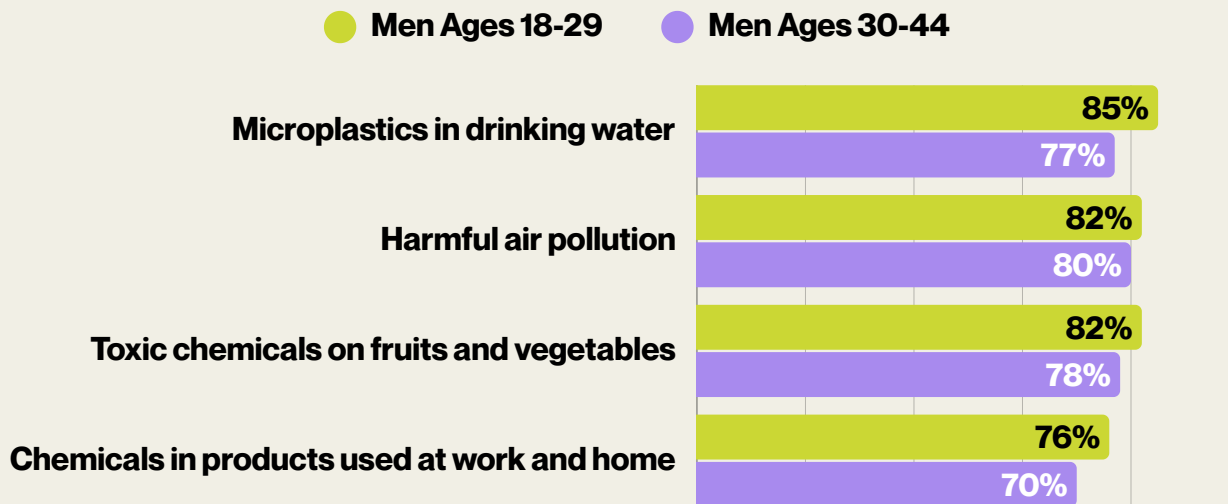
The Environmental Protection Network's (EPN) **Terrible Toxics: A Situation Report** shows how common toxic exposures can come through air pollution, drinking water contamination, pesticides, plastics-related chemicals, industrial emissions, and household products.

**For men, these exposures raise concerns about reproductive health, hormone disruption, heart health, cancer risk, neurological harm, and chronic disease.**

EPN's **recent report** highlighted the impacts pollution has on mothers, babies, and children. However, pollution is a health issue that affects everyone in the family. Men face specific exposure-related health concerns and have a direct stake in whether our nation controls toxic pollution at the source.

Families can take steps to reduce some exposures, but they cannot filter, shop, scrub, or DIY their way out of systemic pollution risks. That is why strong federal safeguards matter.

# Men Are Concerned About Toxic Exposures



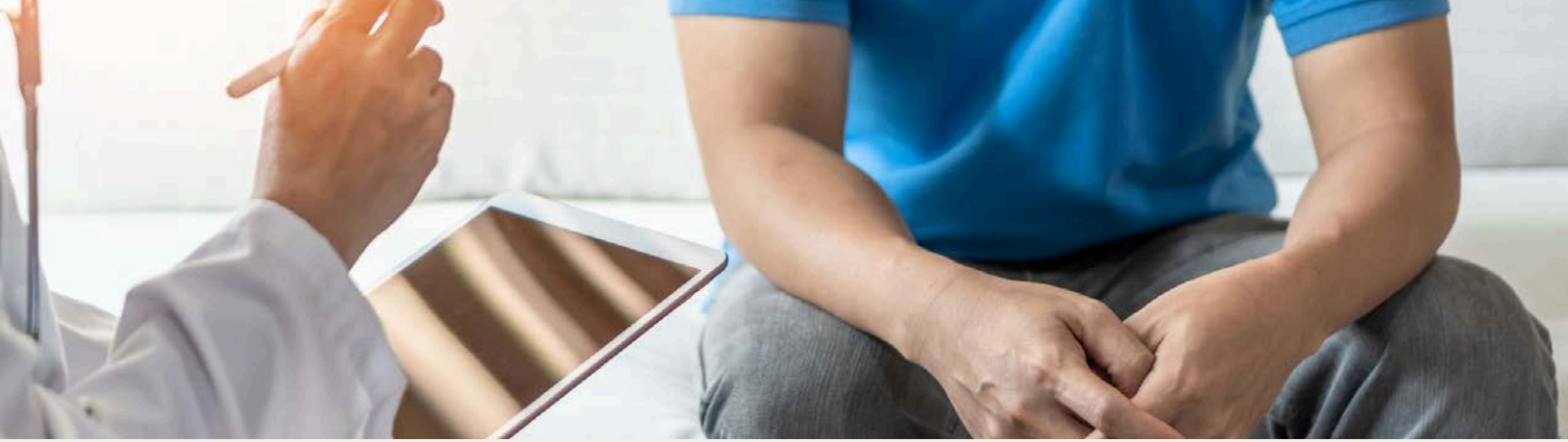
YouGov poll for EPN, May 2026

These findings make clear that concerns about toxic chemicals and pollution cut across gender and age. Men are worried about what these exposures mean for their own health and for the people they care about.

That concern is reasonable. Everyone is being asked to make more and more individual choices about pollution and toxic chemicals: which water filter to buy, which plastic to avoid, which fish to eat, which products to use, when to check the air quality, and how to keep chemicals from coming home from work.

Those choices can help, but they are not enough. People should not have to manage preventable health risks one purchase, one filter, or one personal decision at a time.





## Why This Matters for Men's Health

Researchers are studying how long-term exposure to toxic chemicals and pollution may affect several major areas of men's health. Many of the pollutants highlighted in EPN's Terrible Toxics report are linked to these concerns.



### Reproductive health and fertility

Pollutants of concern include PFAS, phthalates, pesticides, and plastics-related chemicals. These exposures are being studied for links to:

- Lower sperm count and reduced sperm quality
- Changes in sperm motility and function
- Altered testosterone levels and hormone balance
- Increased time to conception and other fertility outcomes

Microplastics have also raised concern because they are widespread in drinking water, food, air, and household dust, and can carry or contain chemicals that may affect reproductive and hormonal health.



### Hormone disruption

Pollutants of concern include phthalates, PFAS, pesticides, and some plastics-related chemicals. These chemicals may interfere with hormone systems connected to:

- Testosterone regulation
- Reproductive health
- Metabolism
- Energy levels
- Mood and overall well-being
- Thyroid function

These chemicals can show up in food packaging, household products, personal care products, drinking water, pesticides, and contaminated dust.



## Heart health

Pollutants of concern include PM2.5, ground-level ozone, lead, and some industrial chemicals. Air pollution, especially fine particle pollution known as PM2.5, is strongly associated with cardiovascular harm, including:

- Increased risk of heart attack
- Increased risk of stroke
- High blood pressure
- Inflammation affecting blood vessels and heart function
- Dangerous heart rhythms

This matters because heart disease is already a leading threat to men's health.

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## Cancer risk

Pollutants of concern include benzene, formaldehyde, arsenic, certain pesticides, PFAS, vinyl chloride, and trichloroethylene. These exposures are associated with increased cancer concerns and can occur through:

- Contaminated air
- Drinking water
- Soil
- Food
- Workplaces
- Industrial releases
- Consumer products





## Brain and nervous system health

Pollutants of concern include lead, mercury, some pesticides, arsenic, and other industrial chemicals. Lead is a well-established neurotoxin. Long-term or repeated exposure can affect:

- Memory
- Cognitive performance
- Neurological function
- Brain health over time

Other pollutants are also linked to concerns about nervous system health, especially when exposure is repeated or occurs over long periods of time.

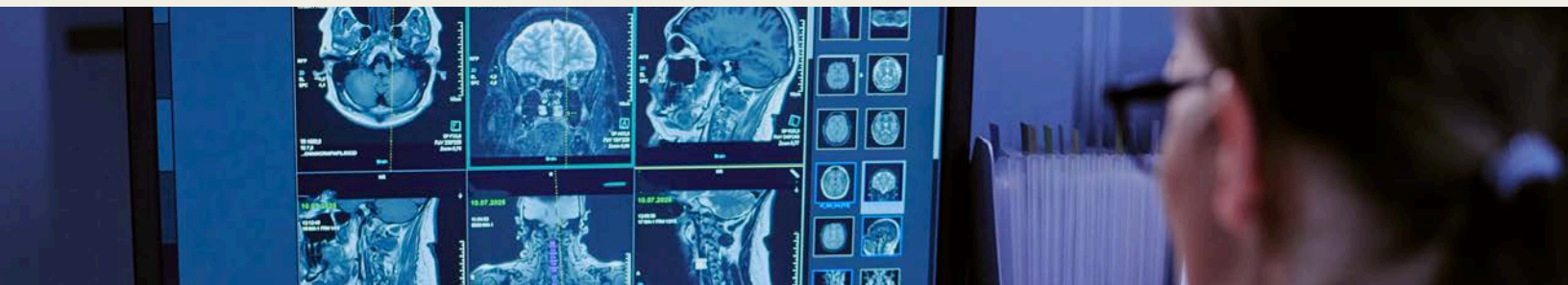


## Long-term chronic disease and inflammation

Pollutants of concern include air pollution, PFAS, pesticides, plastics-related chemicals, arsenic, lead, and other contaminants. Many toxic exposures do not fit neatly into one health category. Researchers are studying how repeated or cumulative exposure may contribute to:

- Chronic inflammation
- Immune system effects
- Metabolic changes
- Insulin regulation
- Long-term chronic disease risk

The point is not that every exposure causes illness in every person. The point is that men should not have to absorb avoidable health risks because safeguards are weakened, chemicals are poorly controlled, or polluters are not held accountable.





## Fathers, Grandfathers, and Family Health

Many men are fathers, grandfathers, caregivers, workers, and family decision-makers. They want good information. They want facts based on real science. They want to know that the choices they make for their children and grandchildren are helping keep them safe.

Dads can fix a lot. But preventing toxic pollution should not be on every dad's to-do list.

Keeping a family healthy should not require a father or grandfather to become a toxicologist, air quality expert, water engineer, product safety researcher, and chemical risk assessor.

### **Families can take reasonable steps to reduce some exposures, including:**

- Checking air quality on high pollution days, wildfire smoke days, and extreme heat days
- Using certified water filters when there are concerns about lead, PFAS, arsenic, or other drinking water contaminants
- Avoiding heating food in plastic and choosing glass or stainless steel when practical
- Washing hands, damp dusting, and using a HEPA-filtered vacuum to reduce contaminated household dust
- Paying attention to fish advisories for mercury, PFAS, and other contaminants
- Watching for pesticide spraying on lawns, parks, ball fields, golf courses, and other places where families spend time
- Taking precautions when work or hobbies involve chemicals, dust, fumes, solvents, or other materials that can be brought home on clothes, shoes, skin, or gear

### **These steps can help reduce some risks. But individual choices can only go so far.**

People cannot shop their way out of unsafe air. They cannot filter their way out contaminated water systems. They cannot read labels for chemicals that are not disclosed. They cannot personally inspect factories, chemical plants, farms, water systems, or product supply chains.



## The Role of the Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) job is to protect people from toxic chemicals and pollution before they cause damage. Strong EPA protections help reduce harmful pollution in the air, water, soil, food supply, workplaces, and products. They also help ensure that the burden and costs of avoiding toxic exposures do not fall entirely on individual families.

### **The EPA does this by:**

- Setting science-based standards for air pollution, drinking water contaminants, toxic chemicals, pesticides, and hazardous waste
- Reviewing chemicals and pesticides to determine how they can be used safely
- Requiring pollution controls that reduce exposure at the source
- Monitoring risks and making information available to the public
- Inspecting facilities and companies to make sure they follow the law
- Enforcing public health protections when polluters put people at risk
- Supporting state, Tribal, and local programs that help identify and reduce pollution

We should be able to trust that government scientists and public health professionals are reviewing risks, sharing reliable information, and requiring polluters to follow the law.

### **When EPA funding is cut, staff are reduced, science programs are weakened, or enforcement is scaled back, the consequences are real:**

- Fewer scientists can review chemical and pesticide risks
- Fewer inspectors can identify violations
- Fewer enforcement actions can hold polluters accountable
- Fewer public reporting tools can help communities understand they're exposure
- Fewer resources are available for states, Tribes, and local communities to protect health

That leaves families with less information, fewer protections, and more responsibility for risks they did not create.

## Men Can't Do This Alone

**Men's health deserves more than advice to exercise, eat better, and see a doctor.**

Those steps matter, but they are not enough. Protecting men's health also means reducing toxic exposures at the source, using independent science, enforcing the law, and making sure the EPA has the resources it needs to protect the public.

Reducing the toxic exposures that threaten men's health also protects women, children, families, workers, and communities. These risks do not stop with one person, one household, or one generation.

Men across the country are concerned about these exposures. The EPA should listen and once again do its part to reduce toxic pollution before it reaches our homes, workplaces, bodies, and families.

This brief is based on EPN's **Terrible Toxics: A Situation Report**, which takes a deeper look at the most common toxic exposures families face.

**To learn more and to take action, visit [SaferNotSicker.org](https://www.safernotsicker.org)**



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The EPA must put our health first.