

# Tennessee Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



Pediatricians have long advocated for healthy environments for children. We have contributed to legislation restricting tobacco use, limiting the use of lead-based paints, and providing clean water for families. However, there continue to be urgent environmental health concerns for children in our increasingly industrialized society. Children are uniquely affected by potentially toxic exposures in their environment due to their 1) still-developing organ systems, 2) immature immune systems, 3) higher minute ventilation, 4) greater consumption of food and water relative to their body weight, and 5) tendency to put their hands and other objects in their mouth.

When considering how children are impacted by their environment, there are two broad categories: direct and indirect exposures. The former includes substances that may be directly exposed to in their home or community. We are all familiar with the effects of lead and tobacco smoke exposure, as well as concerns regarding BPA, nitrates, and arsenic exposure. However, there are many other substances that can impact children's neurodevelopment, hormonal balance (primarily thyroid and estrogen), and predisposition to certain childhood cancers. These include substances found in food packaging and cookware (PFAS), furniture (phthalates), children's pajamas (flame retardants), personal care products (parabens), and certain pesticides, just to name a few.

The second category includes pervasive exposures at an environmental level, such as air pollution, extreme heat, and changes in certain weather patterns that may impact the distribution of vector-borne diseases. These conditions impact a child's ability to safely play outside and enjoy the natural world. As these exposures rise, children are more prone to severe asthma attacks and heat-related illness, both of which can be easily prevented.

TNAAP has recently formed the Environmental Health Committee, which is committed to digging deeper into these issues and providing science-based education and resources that can help protect the health of our young patients and families. If you want to connect with us and learn more about the committee and our work, please contact Ruth Allen ([ruth.allen@tnaap.org](mailto:ruth.allen@tnaap.org)), Dr. Desiree Burroughs-Ray ([dburroug@uthsc.org](mailto:dburroug@uthsc.org)), or Dr. Laurie Tucker ([lauriedawntucker@gmail.com](mailto:lauriedawntucker@gmail.com)).

Sincerely,

Laurie Tucker, MD  
Chair, Committee on Environmental Health