

FACT SHEET: Ortho-phthalates

Consumer Reports Position

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should ban all 30 ortho-phthalates as food contact substances due to human health concerns associated with exposure in food and beverages.

What are They?

Phthalates are a group of chemically and pharmacologically related substances used in hundreds of products, such as toys, detergents, food packaging, pharmaceuticals, and personal care products, including soaps, shampoos, and perfumes. The most predominant phthalates on the market are ortho-phthalates. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ([CDC](#)) and the Consumer Product Safety Commission ([CPSC](#)), **human exposure to ortho-phthalates is virtually ubiquitous in the United States.**

Use in Food Contact Materials

FDA has approved 30 ortho-phthalates for use as food packaging material and processing equipment that comes in contact with food, although 26 are no longer in use. They are used as plasticizers, adhesives, coating agents, cellophane, or paper. Since ortho-phthalates are not part of the plastic structure, **they can leach out and be inhaled, ingested or absorbed through the skin.**

A 2014 [report](#) of the Chronic Hazard Advisory Panel (CHAP) to the CPSC examined ortho-phthalate levels in 261 food items, and concluded that **food, beverages and drugs constituted the highest phthalate exposure sources** for the total population.

Health Effects

A number of studies have found that phthalates can have reproductive, developmental and endocrine health effects, with a particular impact on children's health. More recent [research](#) has found that ortho-phthalates can **impair child brain development and increase children's risk for learning, attention and behavioral disorders**, and have concluded that ortho-phthalates should be banned from a wide array of products. Research has also found that socially vulnerable populations such as communities of color, frequently experience higher exposures to ortho-phthalates.

No FDA Action

In 2016, Consumer Reports [supported](#) a [petition](#) from a coalition of public health and consumer groups which asked FDA to ban all 30 ortho-phthalates as food contact substances due to human health concerns associated with exposure in food and beverages; the group argued that at present levels of exposure, these substance couldn't meet the reasonable certainty of no harm standard.

In 2018, the FDA received a separate [petition](#) to pull approvals for 26 phthalates because they are no longer used as food contact substances. **Of the four phthalates still being used as food contact materials, three have been banned by CPSC from children's toys and child-care products due to human health concerns.**

As of March 2021, FDA has still not acted on either petition.