

Understanding Plastics

LEARN TO USE PLASTICS SAFELY

Plastics are an integral part of our everyday lives--- unbreakable, lightweight, colorful, inexpensive, and easy to mold, but some plastics may have adverse health effects, especially for children.

FOOD and DRINK CONTAINERS. Choose food and drink containers that have been FDA-approved for food use. Other plastics might contain harmful materials.

CLEAN CONTAINERS THOROUGHLY to prevent bacteria from growing.

MICROWAVING. Use polyethylene or polypropylene, which do not contain plasticizers. Containers must be FDA-approved for microwave use. **DO NOT** microwave in polystyrene (Styrofoam), single-use plastic containers, plastic wrap, or in any plastic containers not intended for food use



Plastics can be identified by their recycle codes (#1-#7).

THE SAFEST PLASTICS are:

#2 - High Density Polyethylene (HDPE)

#4 - Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE)

#5 - Polypropylene (PP)

THE LEAST SAFE PLASTICS are:

#3 - Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) often contains plasticizers (added for flexibility), phthalates and other suspected endocrine disrupters. PVC is used in many products, including plastic wrap, bottles, and children's toys. Some PVC contains lead. PVC is difficult to recycle due to its high chlorine content and high levels of toxic additives. Separation and collection costs are high, material quality is greatly reduced after recycling, and the demand for virgin PVC remains high compared to the recycled material.

#6 - Polystyrene (Styrofoam) contains suspected carcinogens and endocrine-disrupting chemicals. Consuming fatty foods or alcohol from these containers is not recommended. It is usually not recyclable.

#7 - Polycarbonate (PC), or Lexan, contains Bisphenol-A, a known hormone disruptor. It can damage reproductive organs and have adverse effects on breast and prostate tissue. PC is used in some Nalgene brand water bottles (hard, colorful bottles), some

baby bottles, in the lining of some aluminum cans, and in some dental fillings and sealants, including those used to prevent tooth decay in children.

#1 - Polyethylene Terephthalate (PETE or PET) is used in single-use water, soda and juice bottles, which are not intended for re-use. They should not be stored for long periods of time or exposed to heat. While easily recyclable, only one in five of these 50 billion single use plastic bottles produced each year actually makes it to a recycling center, while the other 40 billion end up in landfills, incinerators or as roadside litter.

Protect your health, and the environment, and make the switch to a reusable bottle.

Adapted from: www.laptoplunches.com/newsletters/DecemberNewsletter_2005.html.