



# ***In the Spotlight***

Monthly Issues of Interest Presented By  
The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State/ July 2009

## **Toxic Chemicals & Learning Disabilities: Cause and Effect**

***LDANYS has been actively advocating for the reduction of toxic chemicals in our environment that have been linked to learning disabilities for over a decade.***

As an organization that has been providing advocacy and direct services for children and adults with learning disabilities for over 50 years, the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State (LDANYS) knows first hand the impact learning disabilities can have on individuals, families and society as a whole. The indirect and direct costs are enormous. Whether it's the true cost to provide support services for individuals with learning disabilities such as special education or indirect cost such as the emotional toll living daily with a disability takes on individuals and families, the impact can be overwhelming. As the number of individuals diagnosed with learning disabilities continues to rise, it is becoming increasingly difficult for individuals with learning disabilities to access the services they need as demand increases and government resources decrease. For these reasons, working on prevention of learning disabilities is one of LDANYS' top priorities. Of course many causes of learning disabilities are not preventable, therefore LDANYS focuses its prevention efforts on those causes that are. While the exact causes of learning disabilities have yet to be pinpointed, most experts agree that a variety of factors may lead to learning disabilities and may be the result of a combination of factors, not a single cause or event. Suspected causes that are not preventable include genetics and trauma during birth or pregnancy but others may be such as avoiding alcohol and drugs during pregnancy and reducing or eliminating exposure to toxic chemicals during crucial stages of fetal development or early childhood.

The impact exposure to toxic chemicals can have on a developing human being is an issue that has been receiving increasing attention over the past several years. In a *Scientific Consensus Statement on Environmental Agents Associated with Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, developed by the Collaborative on Health and the Environment's Learning and Developmental Disabilities Initiative (posted at <http://www.iceh.org/LDDI.html>), a committee of some of the top scientists and health professionals in the field of environmental health documented a definitive link between exposure to certain environmental contaminants such as lead, mercury, PCBs, PBDEs, other heavy metals, tobacco smoke, alcohol and more and suggested that these toxicants may be responsible for a larger portion of learning and developmental disabilities such as autism than previously suggested. The consensus statements also indicates that based on the evidence that exists, there is sufficient knowledge to take preventive action to reduce fetal and childhood exposure to environmental toxins.

LDANYS has been actively advocating for the reduction of toxic chemicals in our environment that have been linked to learning disabilities for over a decade. In the United States today, there are over 80,000 synthetic chemicals registered for use with an additional 1,000 chemicals added each year. Less than 10% have been tested for their effects on human health. How these chemicals work in combination has also yet to be determined. Many of these chemicals are found in products we come into contact with every day and they can build up in the body over time. Many of these toxic chemicals have been credibly linked to a variety of serious chronic diseases and disabilities.

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### **LDANYS**

**1190 Troy-Schenectady Rd.**

**Latham, NY 12110**

**Ph: 518-608-8992**

**Fax: 518-608-8993**

**E-Mail: [statelda@ldanys.org](mailto:statelda@ldanys.org)**

**Website: [www.ldanys.org](http://www.ldanys.org)**



**LDA Regional Affiliates**

LDA of the Capital District  
(a.k.a. Wildwood Programs)  
2995 Curry Road Extension  
Schenectady, NY 12303

LDA of Central New York  
722 West Manlius Street  
East Syracuse, NY 13057

LDA Life & Learning Services  
339 East Avenue, 4th Floor  
Rochester, NY 14604

LDA of Long Island  
44 South Elmwood Avenue  
Montauk, NY 11954

LDA of the Mohawk Valley  
401 Columbia Street  
Utica, NY 13502

LDA of New York City  
27 West 20th St., Rm. 303  
New York, NY 10011

LDA of the Southern Tier  
112 Nanticoke Avenue  
Endicott, NY 13760

LDA of Western New York  
2555 Elmwood Avenue  
Kenmore, NY 14217

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AT [WWW.LDANYS.ORG](http://WWW.LDANYS.ORG)**

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The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State (LDANYS) was chartered by the New York State Board of Regents in 1958 and is a statewide 501c3 nonprofit, parent-driven organization that advocates on behalf of children and adults who have learning disabilities. LDANYS is the New York state affiliate of the Learning Disabilities Association of America. Our regional affiliates located throughout the state provide a variety of programs and services for children and adults with learning and other developmental disabilities and their families.

For more information about our organization or about the content contained here, please contact our state office at 518-608-8992.

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**Cause & Effect– continued**

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Toxic chemicals that have, until now, remained relatively unknown to most Americans are beginning to take center stage in the media and in local, state and national legislation. LDANYS has been actively involved in raising awareness on and working to ban one particular chemical that is ubiquitous in the products most Americans use in their lives several times throughout any given day. Bisphenol A or BPA is found in many plastic beverage bottles (such as baby bottles, sippy cups and reusable water bottles). BPA is used to give polycarbonate plastic a hardness that makes it shatter-proof and therefore ideal for use in infant and toddler products. BPA is also used in the inner lining of many canned goods and milk cartons.

BPA has been shown in laboratory settings to act as an “endocrine disruptor” meaning it can mimic human hormones and interfere with the proper performance of crucial hormones that are responsible for a variety of human functions. Exposure to endocrine disruptors during brain development have been linked to a variety of cognitive deficits

including decreased IQ and hyperactivity. BPA has been linked to a host of other health hazards including cancer, obesity, and more. These effects are even more devastating to children who are inherently more susceptible.

As more and more people become aware of these chemicals and all of the ways exposure can occur through products that we use in our homes or the food that we eat, the tide toward stemming these exposures and demanding safer alternatives swells. In New York State, five counties have taken steps toward banning BPA. Earlier this year, the Suffolk County legislature passed a ban on BPA in beverage containers marketed to children (ie: baby bottles and sippy cups). Similar bans are also currently being considered by the Albany, Schenectady, Tompkins and Westchester County legislatures as well. LDANYS has actively supported the proposed legislation in Suffolk, Albany and Schenectady Counties and is presently weighing the merits of the proposed bans in Tompkins and Westchester Counties and a state bill of similar substance.