



**COLLEGE OF OBSTETRICIANS
& GYNAECOLOGISTS (CMSA)**

SASOG-SASREG-COG(CMSA) Position Statement on the Endocrine Disruptors in Sanitary pads and pantyliners

Media release

The recent public response, through social media and mainstream media, to a study by Blignaut et al published in Science of The Total Environment, Feb 2026¹ which was conducted at the University of the Free State on the finding of harmful endocrine disrupting chemical's (EDC's) on menstrual products requires context, perspective and correct interpretation of the data, with clear messaging on the broader implications for the public and for the country.

The study, which was conducted on 16 sanitary pads and 7 pantyliners which were bought online, found that small quantities of endocrine disrupting chemicals were present in the tested samples. They concluded that menstrual products are a significant but overlooked source of exposure.

Endocrine disrupting chemicals are products that have the potential to interfere with the action of hormones, especially reproductive and thyroid hormones when the quantities exceed the permissible concentration levels. The permissible concentration levels are determined by the Cosmetic Ingredients Expert panel, and their decisions are used by the relevant regulatory bodies such as the Food and Drug Administration in the US (FDA) to set practice guidelines.

These endocrine disruptors are very common and are present in low concentrations in various foodstuffs, household products, personal care and beauty products such as toothpaste, shampoo and conditioners, body lotions, lipsticks, clothing and electronics. Thus, the finding that they are also found in menstrual products is not surprising. Previous published studies have indeed confirmed that small amounts of these endocrine disruptors are present in menstrual health products. A study in China² reported that 40% of EDC's emanated from foodstuffs, 40% from other personal care products (PCP's) and 18% from indoor dust. Of the PCP's analysed, sanitary pads contributed only 6.8% of the total exposure through feminine PCP's. Thus, if we extrapolate approximately this data to the study under discussion, it is clear that

perspective is required in interpreting the data which should not be isolated to sanitary products which appears to be a small contributor to the overall total EDC exposure. The Table below also shows studies conducted in other countries.

Table 2. Comparison with Estimated Exposure Doses (ng/kg-bw/day) of Phthalates through Various Pathways Reported in Different Studies

region	sources	DMP	DEP	DiBP	DnBP	BzBP	DEHP	references
six countries	marketed sanitary napkins (median)	2.87	1.48	15.1	11.9	0.890	13.7	this study
	marketed sanitary napkins (90th percentile)	4.04	2.91	33.0	20.8	2.91	28.7	
USA	personal care products (leave-on products)	0.6	330	0.5	160	0.3	0.2	Guo & Kannan (2013)
Canada	cosmetic and personal care products (maximum)	30	78000		360		820	Konieczki et al. (2011)
South Korea	cosmetics		600		103		0.6	Koo et al. (2004)
Japan	paper diapers			1.49	2.98	0.434	0.0223	Ishii et al. (2015)
China	cotton clothing	29.0	20	256	296	0.41	66.5	Li et al. (2019)
China	indoor dust ingestion	0.1	0.3	12	14.1	2.0	160	Guo & Kannan (2011)
USA	indoor dust ingestion	0.1	1.4	2.6	8.8	14.3	206	Guo & Kannan (2011)
China	dust ingestion, inhalation and dermal contact	0.584	0.158	14.4	22.3	0.034	88.4	Zhu et al. (2019)
Belgium	dust ingestion in home	0.007	0.3	3.28	6.0	2.08	38.0	Christia et al. (2019)
USA	dust ingestion in home	0.01	0.28	1.03	0.79	27.3	18.1	Subedi et al. (2017)
China	food items (median)	16.5	13.6	245	243	10	620	Guo et al. (2012)
USA	whole diet	4	33	20	184	85	673	Schechter et al. (2013)
UK	whole diet (97.5th percentile)		300	900	300	500	4000	Bradley et al. (2013)
Norway	total daily intake (based on urinary metabolites)	10	890	520	390	130	760	Giovanoulis et al. (2016)
Japan	total daily intake (based on urinary metabolites)			270	210	290	300	Ait Bamai et al. (2015)
USA	total daily intake (based on urinary metabolites)			140	620	440	2700	USCPCSC (2014)

Tang Z, Chai M, Cheng J, Wang Y, Huang Q. Occurrence and distribution of phthalates in sanitary napkins from six countries: implications for women's health. *Environmental science & technology*. 2019 Nov 7;53(23):13919-28.

Importantly the Study from the Free State did **Not** establish causation between the presence of the endocrine disruptors in menstrual products and infertility, hormone dysfunction or cancer. If the data is critically analysed in context, one reaches the conclusion that, while it is important to note the existence of the endocrine disruptors in products used in our daily lives, there is no need to panic. The implication to the general public of harm has not been proven in this study. The daily doses have been found to be low, and the cumulative health risk has not been studied. The evidence at present does not support a change of usual practice. It is our recommendation that the South African Regulatory authorities conduct further testing and studies to determine the safety of these products. It is noteworthy that the study did not recommend that any of the tested products be withdrawn from the market.

In conclusion the South African Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologist (SASOG), together with the South African Society of Reproductive Medicine and Gynaecological Endoscopy (SASREG), its daughter society and the College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists (CMSA), wish to reassure our patients and the public that the study by Blignaut et al, from the University of Free State did not establish any causality between the use of menstrual products (pads and liners) and infertility, cancer or adverse health outcomes. Currently, we do not have evidence to recommend that patients stop using any menstrual health products and we do not recommend any change of usual practice.

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References:

1. Blignaut J, Kemp G, Erasmus E et al. The presence of endocrine disrupting chemical in sanitary pads: A study done in South Africa.
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2. Gao CJ, Kannan K.,2020. Phthalates, bisphenols, parabens and triclocarban in feminine hygiene products from the United States and their implications for human exposue. Environ. Int.136,105465.
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