

Bizarro World: Parents Terrified Of Chemicals Feed Toxic Supplements To Their Kids



By Josh Bloom — August 21, 2019



Chemi-cccccc-als!!!

Suffice it to say that most people are genuinely clueless when it comes to chemistry, let alone, evaluation of the risks and/or benefits of different chemicals. How else could you possibly explain the following disconnect -supplement companies are marketing their dubious products to children and it's working. One-third of the kids in the US is taking a supplement or vitamin.

There is one obvious explanation; "chemical terror groups," like EWG and NRDC **(1)**, and internet screwballs like Mike Adams and Joe Mercola, have a similar business model: fear of chemicals, the more irrational the better, means more donations or sales.

THREE CHEERS FOR THE DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS INDUSTRY

Many of the same people who want to shove their kids into a lead-lined safe room in the basement when someone walks by with a can of Raid or diet soda are unknowingly feeding them multiple unknown chemicals by giving them dietary supplements, virtually none of which are useful and some are dangerous.

I have to tip my hat to the supplement industry. Just like the organic food industry, it has managed to pull the sustainable wool over the eyes of a whole bunch of Americans by convincing them that what they sell is chemical-free and harmless. It is anything but – something Dr. Henry Miller and I wrote about recently for *Issues and Insights* (See [Will Dangerous Dietary Supplements Finally Be Reined In?](#) ^[1])

It is painfully ironic that parents – perhaps the group that is most terrified about everyday chemicals – are unwittingly feeding them to their kids based on the false hope that they will prevent diseases (like the common cold) or treat conditions (like ADHD and autism).

KIDS ARE FAIR GAME

A recent [article](#) [2] in the *Washington Post* revealed that about 5% of dietary supplement marketing targets children. A "hot" product now is elderberry gummies, which are supposed to prevent colds (2). In a [recent study](#) [3] published in *JAMA Pediatrics*, researchers at the Chan School of Public Health at Harvard concluded that [one-third of US children](#) [3] take dietary supplements, mostly vitamins, melatonin, and fatty acids.

"Many of the most commonly used supplements, including multivitamins, are implicated in preventable adverse drug events among this population.

*D. Qato, et. al., JAMA Pediatr. 2018;172(8):780-782.
doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.1008*

Not all supplements are equal or equally harmful. An [article](#) [4] in the June issue of *The Journal of Adolescent Health* documented 977 supplement–related adverse event reports (single supplements only) in people younger than age 25 between 2004-2015. Although adverse events were much more common in dietary and herbal supplements that were supposed to "treat" a condition (3), there were still problems with vitamins,

"Consumption of dietary supplements sold for weight loss, muscle building, and energy involved increased risks for severe medical events compared with vitamins. Proactive enforcement of regulations is needed to reduce access and consumption among children, adolescents, and young adults."

S.B. Austin, et. al., June 18, 2018. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.1008 [5]

THE PROBLEM ISN'T JUST THE SUPPLEMENT. WHAT'S IN THE BOTTLE?

Perhaps more disturbing is a [2019 article](#) [6] in *Hepatology Communications*, in which researchers were trying to determine which supplements cause liver damage. The study does not get that far, but it is useful nonetheless. The group first determined whether the label accurately represents what is in the bottle. It's a coin flip. Victor J. Navarro, M.D. of the Department of Digestive Disease and Transplantation at Albert Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia and colleagues from five other major medical centers in the US examined 272 herbal and dietary supplements and found that 51% (!) of the labels were inaccurate.

In particular:

- "Of the 272 products tested, only 132 had labels that accurately reflected the compounds identified by chemical analysis"
- "140 (51%) were mislabeled. These 140 products lacked at least one of the listed compounds (number of ingredients ranged from 1 to 21)"
- "55 products contained compounds not listed on the label, including 2 that were pharmaceuticals.
- The overall mislabeling rate was 51%, and rates were higher for steroidal (82%) than botanical (44%) and vitamin (49%) products.

In other words, there is no way to know what parents are giving their kids because half the time the label is inaccurate. So even if a given supplement "works" for something or other it may or may not be in the bottle and if it is, it can be contaminated.

WHY SHOULD KIDS TAKE SUPPLEMENTS AT ALL?

That's an easy one, thanks to ACSH advisor Dr. David Seres, director of medical nutrition, Columbia University Irving Medical Center, New York Presbyterian Hospital. They shouldn't.

"It is perpetually frustrating to me that parents are willing to feed untested and unproven nostras and potions to their children, exposing them to potential harm with little likelihood of benefit, simply because they are touted as "natural" or "nutritional", while at the same time dismissing scientific fact simply because it is scientific."

David Seres, M.D., private communication, 8/20/19

It is mind-boggling that so many people are terrified of chemicals that they avoid touching cash register receipts, or won't eat anything not labeled GM-free, blithely feed their kids who-knows-what because they perceive supplements as safe, natural, and chemical-free.

There ought to be a law **(4)**.

NOTES:

(1) EWG is short for the Environmental Working Group. NRDC stands for the Natural Resources Defense Council. It is difficult to determine which group is worse scientifically at any given time. Perhaps they take turns. Both groups are run by highly-paid lawyers and poly-majors, not scientists. If you want to "favor" NRDC then read [NRDC's Hitler-Pesticide Video Worthy Of Joseph Goebbels](#) [7].

(2) There is no evidence that elderberry prevents colds but it may help people feel better sooner.

(3) Anything that treats or prevents a condition or disease is a drug. This is part of the FDA's definition of what a drug is.

(4) There is, more or less. In 2015 New York Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman sent cease-

and-desist letters to GNC, Target, Walgreens, and Walmart after a study commissioned by his office found that supplement labels sold in the state were woefully lacking. The following month he issued a [statement](#) ^[8] announcing an agreement that his office reached with the companies in question. Both Dr. Seres and I were quoted in Schneiderman's press release.

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Links

- [1] <https://issuesinsights.com/2019/04/23/will-dangerous-dietary-supplements-finally-be-reined-in/>
- [2] https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/more-parents-give-dietary-supplements-to-kids-but-experts-warn-about-their-potential-danger/2019/08/16/b27bc09e-bd29-11e9-b873-63ace636af08_story.html
- [3] <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2685282>
- [4] [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(19\)30163-6/fulltext](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(19)30163-6/fulltext)
- [5] <http://jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?doi=10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.1008>
- [6] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6545864/>
- [7] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/07/08/nrdcs-hitler-pesticide-video-worthy-joseph-goebbels-13167>
- [8] <https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/ag-schneiderman-announces-agreement-gnc-implement-landmark-reforms-herbal-supplements>