Activists and some politicians are exploiting parents’ legitimate concerns for their children's health by trying to convince state governments to pass a ban on the safe and eminently useful chemical bisphenol-A (BPA).

BPA has been used in many familiar guises for decades, with absolutely no reliable evidence of harm to humans of any age. Considering its many uses, one might say it's almost ubiquitous. Among the most common uses: plastic bottles of many types--it’s required in the manufacture of shatter-proof polycarbonate plastic, which is also invaluable in baby bottles, bike helmets and protective car-seats, eyeglass lenses, and medical devices of many kinds. The resin coatings that protect the integrity of canned food and beverages--as well as nearly all electronic circuit boards--also depend on BPA.

So what's all the fuss about? It has been claimed that low doses of hormonally-active substances in the environment may cause health problems, but this allegation is highly controversial. Multiple studies by both government and private researchers have not shown any evidence of adverse effects in humans. My organization, the American Council on Science and Health, published a peer-reviewed scientific assessment of the available data, including both animal and human studies, that found no compelling evidence that people are being put at risk by the trace levels of exposure to BPA.

Since BPA is found in our bodies--although at extremely minute amounts--some groups have seized upon this as an excuse to frighten parents and seek government and media attention. However, with our increasingly sophisticated analytical techniques, near-infinitesimal quantities of almost anything can be detected in our blood and tissues. Even the Centers for Disease Control have stated that the mere presence of a substance in our bodies does not mean that it's harmful.

Periodically, activists with an anti-chemical agenda pick up on these issues and start pressuring politicians at various levels of government to ban or restrict consumer products, based on nothing more than hypothetical dangers like this one.

Despite what’s been painted as received truth in the activist blogosphere, the FDA’s conclusions are based on the full weight of scientific evidence after their review of hundreds of studies from all sources, not just a few industry-funded studies. Official scientific analyses worldwide have comprehensively reviewed the actual data, and have reached similar conclusions: BPA in consumer products is safe as currently used.

If states take a stricter view of BPA than the U.S. FDA, and even the ultra-precautionary EU, what will be activists’ next target? With a safety track record spanning more than fifty years, BPA is one
of the best-tested substances in commerce. What would replace BPA in the many applications it is essential for? Will glass replace shatter-proof baby bottles? Will some other chemical replace it in bike helmets--only to come under activist attack in a year or two, since the safety record of any replacement will be more suspect than this well-known substance?

Let's not throw the baby bottles out with the bath water. There isn’t a shred of scientific or medical sense in the proposed ban of bisphenol-A. If there were, wouldn't the regulators and their expert scientific advisors around the world have taken notice, after decades of its safe consumer use? Regulators should resist the political pressure to target BPA and follow the scientific and medical database supporting BPA’s continuing safe use--for all ages of consumers.

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