



## *Preventing Arsenic Exposure from Pressure Treated Wood*

### *Recommendations for Action*

**Step One:** Test your wood. Two to three weeks after returning your samples, you will receive your test results and important information explaining those results. Before then, you can take the simple steps described in this pamphlet to reduce your family's exposure to arsenic from your deck, play set, picnic table or other structures, made with CCA-pressure treated wood.

### *Introduction*

Since the 1970s, most of the pressure-treated wood used in the United States for outdoor structures such as playground equipment, picnic tables, benches and decks has been treated with a preservative called Chromate Copper Arsenate (CCA). CCA is a potent pesticide that is 22 percent arsenic.

Arsenic is easily rubbed off the surface of CCA-treated wood for the entire life of the structure. Arsenic also leaches from the wood to contaminate adjacent soil. It sticks to children's hands when they touch the wood or the soil. Once on the skin, arsenic also absorbs through skin and into the body. Because children under six years old put their fingers and hands in their mouths frequently, they can ingest potentially dangerous amounts of arsenic after touching CCA-treated wood.

Why does this matter? Arsenic is known to cause cancer in humans. It is a potent skin, bladder, and lung carcinogen. It is also linked to liver and kidney cancer, immune system suppression, cardiovascular disease, hormonal problems, and diabetes.

### *Where do you find CCA-treated wood?*

CCA-treated wood has been used for outdoor residential structures such as playground equipment, fences, gazebos, decks and patios, landscaping timbers, foundations, walkways, boat docks, park benches, and picnic tables. It has also been used for outdoor industrial structures such as utility and construction poles, marine timbers and pilings.

### *How are children exposed to arsenic from playing on CCA-treated wood?*

Recent studies confirm that high levels of arsenic can be released to children's hands by direct contact with arsenic-treated wood. Young children in particular are at risk of ingesting (swallowing) arsenic when they put their hands in their mouths after touching CCA-treated wood. Children are more vulnerable than adults particularly because their bodies are still growing and developing and because their livers metabolize the toxic metal more slowly.



Home test kits can be purchased online at the [www.safe2play.org](http://www.safe2play.org) web site for \$20 dollars. The kits available online are:

- "Wipe kit": used to test for arsenic on the wood surface.
- "Hot spot kit": a soil testing kit that can identify medium and high arsenic contamination from a small area
- "Detailed soil kit": a soil testing kit that can identify low levels of contamination undetectable by the "hot spot" test.

**Step Two:** Take action to reduce arsenic exposure:

If possible, replace your arsenic treated wood structures with safer alternatives (wood with arsenic-free preservatives, naturally pest and rot resistant cedar or redwood, or recycled plastic composites).



If you have CCA-treated that cannot be removed

- **Seal the wood at least once a year.** Current research indicates that treating CCA lumber with solid or semi-transparent oil-based deck stain will generally lock in most of the arsenic for approximately 18 months. If you would like to ask an expert about other alternatives, e-mail us at [info@safe2play.org](mailto:info@safe2play.org)
- **Wash your hands and your children's hands** after every exposure to arsenic treated wood, especially before eating.
- **Do not store toys or tools under CCA wooden structures.** Arsenic leaches from the wood when it rains and may coat objects stored under decks or tables.
- **Keep children and pets away from the soil** near arsenic treated wood structures.
- **Cover arsenic treated picnic tables** with a tablecloth before using them.

**Until 2004 almost 90% of all outdoor structures made with pressure treated wood contained arsenic.**

**The production of CCA pressure treated wood for residential uses was stopped in 2004. However, old inventory of CCA wood continues to be sold to unaware consumers**

**Kids who have hand-to-mouth contact with CCA treated wood that has not been properly sealed increase their chances of cancer during their lifetime 500 times (1 in 2000).**

*Where can I find more information?*

Please visit our web site at [www.safe2play.org](http://www.safe2play.org) or e-mail us at [info@safe2play.org](mailto:info@safe2play.org)

The website provides important health and safety information about the dangers posed to young children and the general public from the use of CCA-treated wood. It also explains how to obtain a simple arsenic test kit and offers safety precautions and simple steps to protect you and your family from arsenic exposure. Some materials are also available in Spanish and Chinese.

[www.safe2play.org](http://www.safe2play.org)  
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*The Safe Playgrounds Project*

*Raising awareness about the dangers of CCA pressure treated wood in our communities*



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