



# Scientists to assess the level of toxic chemicals in European people

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**Scientists at the Health Protection Agency are to investigate the extent to which people are being exposed to several chemicals found in the environment.**

**As well as researching the average level of mercury found in people's hair, experts at the HPA will be investigating the average level of cadmium, phthalates and tobacco smoke chemicals found in people's urine in the UK.**

The results could help scientists to pinpoint areas where people are being exposed to relatively high levels of the chemicals.

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) is leading the UK part of the project, known as DEMOCOPHES, which includes studies in 15 other European countries.

Dr Ovnair Sepai of the HPA said: "We are recruiting 120 volunteer mothers and children to take part in this UK pilot study. By comparing results from each country we will be able to reveal the baseline of average exposure to the chemicals for people in Europe. Future research could then determine areas of higher than average exposure, and help deliver our long term objective to find out if these pollutants are affecting people's health."

The project will build on another project, known as COPHES, which involves 27 European countries, and aims to establish a consistent way of measuring chemicals found in hair and body fluids.

## Notes to editors

Human Biomonitoring is a tool that can be used to assess human exposure and uptake of chemicals.

The Consortium to Perform Human Biomonitoring on a European Scale (COPHES) was formed in December 2009 by scientists from 27 European countries to establish harmonised procedures for human biomonitoring so that data from across Europe is more comparable.

DEMOCOPHES is a human biomonitoring study that will test COPHES procedures. In each country the exposure to cadmium, methyl mercury, phthalates as well as cotinine, a marker of exposure to passive environmental tobacco smoke, will be assessed in 120 children and their mothers by sampling urine and/ or hair.

Funding for the UK part of the DEMOCOPHES project is being split equally between the EU and the HPA. More information is available on the project website: <http://www.eu-hbm.info>

Phthalates is a name given to a group of chemicals widely used as plasticizers in material such as PVC and thus widely used in consumer products.

For interviews or more information please contact the HPA press office on 01235 822745/876.

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