

Latte materno, diossine e PCB

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BREASTMILK, DIOXINS AND PCBs

Key words

Breastmilk, Dioxin, Polychlorinated biphenyls, Incinerator, Biomonitoring

Summary

The presence of dioxin and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in breastmilk and their transfer to the infant represent the tip of the iceberg of a serious situation: the exposure in utero and the subsequent damage to the foetus. Several populations, especially those living in densely industrialised areas, are subject to increasing exposure to these and other pollutants. Monitoring the contamination of breastmilk allows the present and past exposure in a population to be estimated. Thanks to the control measures implemented after the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants in 2004, the levels of contamination are decreasing in Europe. Alarming situations persist, however, in some places: in Italy these concentrate around densely industrialised areas and close to incinerators. In Taranto and Montale (Pistoia), upon citizens' initiatives, samples of breastmilk were analysed and levels of dioxins far higher than those recommended as safe were found. In Montale, the profile of PCBs found in breastmilk was exactly the same as the one of those released by the incinerator. These results should not be used to discourage breastfeeding, which may in fact represent an advantage, compared to non breastfeeding, for those infants already exposed to the same substances in utero. They should be used instead, with the setting up of a regular biomonitoring system by the competent authorities, to advocate for public policies aiming at a different model of development that will safeguard the health of future generations.