

Setting the record straight on BPA (again)

BY STEVEN HENTGES, PH.D ON OCTOBER 5, 2016 IN INDUSTRY

The topic of endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) has been popular lately with many “experts” weighing in with their opinions on everything from the basic definition of EDCs to what to do about them. With scientific issues like this, the words attributed to Daniel Patrick Moynihan bear repeating: “everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.”

A recent example is an [article](#) in the online publication MedPage Today titled “EDCs: An Area of Growing Concern,” and subtitled “Expert: too little testing of BPA, phthalates.” While the article focused on comments from an “expert,” it would have benefited immensely from some editorial fact-checking.

Whether chemicals such as [bisphenol A](#) (BPA) are [EDCs](#) is a controversial question that has not yet arrived at a consensus answer. But what’s most shocking about the MedPage article is that the “expert” stated that “chemicals that come into contact with food (e.g. plastic water and food containers, cans, etc.) are not regulated by the FDA, since they’re not actually added to food and beverages.” This is unequivocally false.

The [basic definition of a food additive](#), taken directly from the 1958 legislation that provides the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) regulatory authority on this matter, is:

A food additive is defined in Section 201(s) of the FD&C Act as ... including any substance intended for use in producing, manufacturing, packing, processing, preparing, treating, packaging, transporting, or holding food.

Since 1958, FDA has amassed almost 300 pages of regulations that specifically apply to materials that come into contact with food. Included are sections on plastics, as used in water and food containers, as well as sections on materials used in food and beverage cans.

Since 1997, when Congress updated the legislation to streamline FDA’s process for regulating food-contact substances, well over 1,000 food-contact notifications have been submitted to FDA on new food-contact substances or applications. **Without question, chemicals that come into contact with food have been well-regulated by FDA for almost 60 years.**

The claim that there is too little testing of BPA is farfetched. A quick search of [PubMed](#), a readily available biomedical literature database operated by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), reveals over 10,000 scientific studies on BPA.

Most importantly, this number includes a set of 30 comprehensive safety studies conducted by independent U.S. federal government scientists from FDA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Toxicology Program (NTP), and the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNL). The studies were designed to answer key questions and resolve uncertainties about the safety of BPA, and include the largest study ever conducted on BPA.

The [results of these and other studies](#) reveal that:

- Consumer exposure to BPA is extremely low;
- BPA is rapidly eliminated from the body; and
- There is no risk of health effects at typical consumer exposure levels.

Collectively, federal government studies provide strong support for the safety of BPA and underpin FDA's current perspective on BPA. In answer to the [question](#) "Is BPA safe?", the unambiguous answer from FDA is "Yes." Many [other government bodies](#) around the world agree with this conclusion based on their own review of the science.

It's disappointing that a publication promoting itself as "a trusted and reliable source for clinical and policy coverage that directly affects the lives and practices of health care professionals" could be so wrong. Fortunately the true experts at FDA have spoken.