



Reducing Environmental Dangers to Children

BOOK REVIEW



By Bryan Mih, MPH, MSIII

CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH: REDUCING RISK IN A DANGEROUS WORLD, Dona Schneider and Natalie Freeman, American Public Health Association, Washington, DC, 157 pp, 2000. ISBN: 0-87553-241-1.

Make sure that all playground and swimming activities are supervised by an adult... Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold... Wage war on dust and mold...

These are not quite commandments, but more like directives in a book telling children what they should and shouldn't do. They are some of the common sense recommendations in *Children's Environmental Health*, a new book from the American Public Health Association. Simple prevention of childhood exposures and accidents is advocated as the most effective way to decrease risks to children.

The authors provide some basic information that should be familiar to most physicians and child health professionals. They discuss the most common health dangers in the environment for children, wisely narrow their scope of subjects and speak to the reader quite simply.

This book contains useful information of public health interest and could serve well as a primer for concerned parents and educators. There are only six chapters, and two are devoted exclusively to the dangers of lead and the complications of asthma. The material has been extensively researched and a myriad of sources are referenced.

Available in paperback, it is small enough to be handy and to be read in a short time. The authors do not really break new ground, but do a good job of summarizing and compiling available information. They selected to focus on classic public health environmental exposures and to exclude more involved and complex discussions of violence and abuse.

A small reference book, rather than a comprehensive tome, should make information more accessible. Key to its usefulness is that it hits the most common childhood environmental concerns such as lead exposure, allergies, basic hygiene, and injury prevention without much extraneous clutter. The concluding chapter summarizes the preceding chapters and lists simple recommendations for parents in just a few pages.

The authors had a good idea with the appendix of the book, which contains activities for children. Some simple games teach children the importance of sanitation and safety, outlined in instructional form for the parents.

However, the authors could have taken the idea one step further and created handouts that speak directly to children in clear and easily understandable language. Also, the all-text format of the book leaves one wanting pictures and diagrams which could assist in explaining concepts to children.

Who exactly is the intended audience for this book? Much of the material in this book is common sense, and people with children would be able to recognize some of the usual

risks to children - from objects toddlers place in their mouths to youngsters chasing balls that roll out into the street. Perhaps it was intended as a good primer for motivated parents and a quick reference for pediatricians and child health professionals.

However, although the book's language is relatively simple for health care professionals, it may be too text-intensive for average parents, who would likely pick up the same suggestions from glossy parenting magazines or more widely-distributed books on parenting at the local library or bookstore.

This is a good effort at collecting and summarizing the most important environmental health topics involving children, but the book is likely to sit on a library shelf.

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