

# Uses of pesticide in foods : Curse for health

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The World Health Organization and the UN Environment Programme estimate that each year, 3 million workers in agriculture in the developing world experience severe poisoning from pesticides, about 18,000 of whom die. Use of pesticides in India began in 1948 when DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) was imported for malaria control and BHC for locust control. India started pesticide production with manufacturing plant for DDT and benzene hexachloride (BHC) in the year 1952. Currently, there are approximately 145 pesticides registered for use, and production has increased to approximately 85,000 metric tonnes. Rampant use of these chemicals has given rise to several short-term and long-term adverse effects of these chemicals. The first report of poisoning due to pesticides in India came from Kerala in 1958 where, over 100 people died after consuming wheat flour contaminated with parathion. Subsequently several cases of pesticide-poisoning including the Bhopal disaster have been reported. Despite the fact that the consumption of pesticides in India is still very low, about 0.5 kg/ha of pesticides against 6.60 and 12.0 kg/ha in Korea and Japan, respectively, there has been a widespread contamination of food commodities with pesticide residues, basically due to non-judicious use of pesticides. In India, 51 per cent of food commodities are contaminated with pesticide residues and out of these, 20 per cent have pesticides residues above the maximum residue level values on a worldwide basis. It has been observed that their long-term, low-dose exposure are increasingly linked to human health effects such as immune-suppression, hormone disruption, diminished intelligence, reproductive abnormalities, and cancer. In this light, problems of pesticide safety, regulation of pesticide use, use of biotechnology, and biopesticides, and use of pesticides obtained from natural plant sources such as neem extracts are some of the future strategies for minimizing human exposure to pesticides.

**Key words :** Pesticide toxicity, Poisoning, Pesticide exposure, Health hazards

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