

1 Tips on PCBs

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3 PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are nonflammable insulators that were widely used in  
4 industrial and commercial applications until banned in the United States in 1979. Renovating old  
5 buildings can release PCBs into the environment, where they can persist for decades in water and  
6 soil and build up in fish.

7 Chronic or high-level exposure to PCBs can cause cystic skin-colored lesions called chloracne,  
8 which often affect the face and can last decades. Exposure to PCBs has also been associated with  
9 melanoma. Children with in-utero exposure may have impaired cognition and memory.

10 Blood PCB levels have limited clinical utility as they cannot predict health effects. However,  
11 elevated levels can confirm occupational exposure in some situations.

12 Treatment is primarily supportive, and ongoing exposure should be avoided or reduced when  
13 possible. Consider consultation with a dermatologist for chloracne.

14 Counsel patients to eat a variety of foods, follow local fish advisories, and select “best choice” fish  
15 from government lists. These lists include specific recommendations for pregnancy, breastfeeding,  
16 and childhood. If patients catch their own fish, encourage them to eat a variety of fish from  
17 different locations. Advise patients that employers are responsible for informing them of their  
18 workplace hazards, providing proper PPE, and ensuring that workspaces are well-ventilated.  
19 Counsel patients who work with PCB-containing materials to use proper PPE.

20 Visit ATSDR’s website to learn more.