

## A new study is making us antsy.

Followers of the Environmental Defence blog will be familiar with [phthalates](#), hormone-disrupting chemicals found in PVC and [personal care products](#). Phthalates have been linked to asthma, obesity, and, recently the phthalate DEHP was listed as a probable human carcinogen by the [World Health Organization](#).

And now scientists say phthalates are being found in an unlikely place – in [ants!](#)

What's the big deal? Phthalates in ants is a problem because it indicates that these chemicals are so widespread in the environment that even industrious insects in their natural habitat are being exposed.

Alain Lenoir at François Rabelais University in France has been studying ants since 1968. When he found phthalates in the cuticles of common black ants near Tours, Lenoir decided to conduct further testing. The result? Phthalates were found in all species of ants tested, not only from the Tours region, but also in ants from Hungary, Spain, Morocco, Greece, Burkina Faso and Egypt.

Ants kept in a phthalate-free open box in Lenoir's lab showed increased levels of phthalates, compared to ants kept in a closed box. The ants in the open box were picking up trace amounts of ambient phthalates from within the lab environment itself.

The [New York Times](#) green blog featured a piece about the study, in which the [chemical industry lobby group](#), the American Chemistry Council is used as a source regarding the use and prevalence of phthalates. The blog refers to these chemicals as “almost inescapable, so essential is their use in the modern economy.” But to call phthalates *essential* is a misnomer. If they were an essential ingredient, France would not currently be working to [ban phthalates](#) from medical devices. In fact, PVC-free (and thereby phthalate-free) [alternatives are available](#) for most medical products.

Like [BPA](#), phthalates are yet another type of chemical that is widespread, unhealthy, and unnecessary.

There are several ways you can reduce your exposure to phthalates. Avoid purchasing PVC products, which use phthalates as a softener. Undertaking home improvements? Look for [low VOC](#) (volatile organic compound) emitting materials. And use our [Toxic Ten](#) guide to decode labels when purchasing cosmetics and grooming products.

Phthalates are often a hidden ingredient in fragrance or parfum, but some companies are changing that by fully disclosing their fragrance ingredients, or not using fragrance at all. Check out our list of companies that have taken the [Just Beautiful Pledge](#), and are providing phthalate-free products, and sign a [petition](#) to the Canadian Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association (CCTFA), asking companies to take toxic ingredients out, and fully disclose what's in products.

There are many ways to reduce the amount of phthalates in your environment. Give it a try, if not for yourself and your loved ones, do it for the ants!