Today’s piece was prepared by Rachel Phelan, MD and comes from a TIME Magazine article, “Mom’s Exposure to Air Pollution Can Increase Kids’ Behavior Problems”<http://healthland.time.com/2012/03/23/moms-exposure-to-air-pollution-can-increase-kids-behavior-problems/>

This article summarizes a study published in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* in March 2012, investigating the role of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) exposure in utero on later childhood development and behavior issues. PAHs are mainly found in car exhaust and cigarette smoke. The study population consisted of non-smoking mothers in an inner-city area and PAH levels were measured in their blood during the third trimester of pregnancy. These levels were then correlated with her child’s later development of depression, anxiety and attention problems, reporting that children exposed to higher levels of PAHs are at a significantly increased risk of developing these behavior problems, by a mechanism not well understood.

This article summarizes the study well, but the study in general has multiple downfalls. For instance, the population studied was focused on a single urban area, limiting generalizability since pollutants may vary by location, even if the pollutants do fall within the PAH umbrella. Second, ascertainment only of inner-city urban mothers may exclude other confounding factors. Importantly, no clear statement about a standardization method for diagnosis was utilized. Another point that may frustrate urban-dwelling parents is that environmental PAHs may be unavoidable. However, the article does recognize many of these critiques and has some value to the public. For instance, the article reinforces the message to parents of potentially harmful effects of secondary tobacco exposure, even while in utero. It also helps to raise awareness of the importance of environmental health, in general, on child development. This may prompt parents’ curiosity about other well-studied environmental exposures that may be harmful to their children, such as lead-based paint.

**RESOURCES ON ENVIRONMENT**

<http://www2.aap.org/richmondcenter/Parents_Families.html> AAP Richmond Center of Excellence provides an internet resource for families and clinicians outlining the harmful effects of tobacco use on children and provides tips for how to quit

<http://aoec.org/pehsu/serviceareas.html> Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) website which has a number of handouts and other resources for parents and clinicians, including how to find a pediatric environmental health specialist

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!