

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/opinion/editorial/bs-ed-0226-chlorpyrifos-children-20200225->

<vyn2n46j25hvrcegm6crdvxwfe-story.html>

# Maryland should ban child-endangering chlorpyrifos permanently | COMMENTARY

By BALTIMORE SUN EDITORIAL BOARD

BALTIMORE SUN |

FEB 25, 2020 | 12:43 PM



Apples are displayed at a farmers market in Arlington, Va. Chlorpyrifos, a common pesticide used on citrus fruits, broccoli, asparagus and other crops, would be banned under a proposal pending before the Maryland General Assembly. (J. Scott Applewhite/AP)

When the top food-producing state moved to ban a pesticide that's been on the market for decades, you better believe it had good reason. California made that decision last year because of the clear and incontrovertible evidence

developed by multiple studies over more than a decade that chlorpyrifos is linked to childhood brain damage. The state had to do it, because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency failed to despite moving in that direction while Barack Obama was president — a decision that even science skeptics should find despicable. The evidence was so compelling that chlorpyrifos was banned from indoor use nearly a quarter-century ago.

That leaves it up to states to protect the health of all Americans and spare the youngest from such ill effects as reduced IQ, attention deficit disorders and delayed motor development.

The good news is that a key Maryland Senate committee recently approved [legislation imposing a statewide ban](#) for most crops by year's end in a 7-4 vote. The bad news is that the members saw fit to tack on an amendment that would cause the ban to expire in four years. No doubt there were people in the farming community pleading for that loophole, much as some are hoping lawmakers will defer to Gov. Larry Hogan, whose Department of Agriculture is in the process of proposing regulations “phasing out” the pesticide. The aim in both cases appears to be to weaken the measure whether through delay or expiration. And while we are normally sympathetic to the concerns of farmers, Maryland has ample reason to move aggressively on this issue. Chlorpyrifos is not only a threat to children, it poses a danger to the health of the Chesapeake Bay as well. Pesticide runoff from farm fields can not only hurt aquatic life, it is poisoning bees and other pollinators. And it will surely be as toxic in four years as it is today.

Last year, the General Assembly had an opportunity to ban chlorpyrifos but chose not to do so. One of the counter arguments was that the chemical might prove useful in killing an invasive species from China, India and Vietnam, the [spotted lanternfly](#), which is still a threat to a variety of crops. Experts recommend a variety of counter measures including manually destroying egg masses. The preferred insecticide is dinotefuran, which is also used to prevent fleas and ticks in dogs, but there are a variety of treatments including non-

toxic oils and soaps. In other words, chlorpyrifos is not needed for this purpose. So why does it still get mentioned? Most likely because the spotted lanternfly is the pest of the moment. One thing it's not, is an especially compelling reason to put developing minds at risk.

Granted, Maryland should not be in a position to make this decision. In a better-run country, harmful pesticides would be banned nationally not state by state, yet that isn't a choice in this case. California hasn't acted alone. Oregon and Hawaii have also restricted its use. New York is in the process of doing so. And the list of countries that have banned the Dow Chemical product is a lengthy one including members of the European Union. Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh is among a group of state attorneys general that have filed suit challenging the EPA's backtracking on the pesticide. All have recognized that the likelihood of chlorpyrifos residue remaining on popular items on the produce aisle such as strawberries or broccoli is too great to ignore. Why anyone, most especially the EPA, would not err on the side of caution is mind-boggling. Who exactly is supposed to be acting as a watchdog in the public interest if not the federal government's chief environmental regulator? The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) is among the advocates who found the EPA's decision "alarming."

Given Maryland's circumstances, lawmakers should not be proud to cast a vote to protect children and the health of the Chesapeake Bay. Even Maryland farmers recognize the writing on the wall ([albeit by supporting the Hogan administration's regulatory approach instead of the legislation pending in Annapolis](#)). Yet even that objection is more about process than substance. If the bill's opponents have studies that show conclusively that chlorpyrifos poses no threat, let them come forward and make their case. They can't, of course, because that's not what the science supports. Delayed and weakened regulations aren't good enough. Maryland really has no choice in

the matter but to do what the EPA should have done five years ago and ban the harmful chemical from crops.