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Test for [redacted] in human milk to be changed

Special to The Globe and Mail

REGINA — Testing procedures on mothers' milk for [redacted] are being changed, and nursing mothers in a probable high-risk contamination area of Regina are being canvassed to provide milk samples.

Provincial epidemiologist Dr. Richard Mathias said that more than 60 nursing mothers who have already provided milk samples will be asked whether their samples were taken over a 24-hour period.

Only samples taken over at least that time will be used now to determine the average PCB level present in mothers' milk.

The change in testing procedures took place yesterday after Dr. Mathias was told that PCB concentrations in mothers' milk vary greatly over 24 hours.

Dr. Steven Safe of the University of Guelph said in an interview that a tremendous difference in mothers' milk fat content and PCB levels takes place over 24 hours. A four-to-five-fold variation can occur during a day.

The highest PCB levels in mothers' milk occur at night, according to Dr. Safe.

A woman's diet and the lactation day on which the tests are taken can also markedly affect test results, he said.

After checking with Dr. Safe, Dr. Mathias said the province will change its testing procedures.

The program is a result of PCBs being found in Regina's drinking water at concentrations of two to eight parts per billion. A series of tests taken at all Regina wells, reservoirs and pumping stations will not be finished until at least tomorrow.

PCBs were used in electrical transformers and capacitors because of their fire retardant and non-electrical conductive properties.

A spill of 1,500 to 2,000 gallons of Aroclor, a PCB brand name owned by Monsanto Corp., took place at a [redacted] Ltd. plant at Regina in 1978.

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