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The Ban on DDT

Dr. Caryl H. Hyland's article¹ debunks the ban on DDT, which was based on its toxicity. As a loyal member of the AAPS and a lifelong environmentalist, I would like to protest her assumption and emphasize some facts.

We still find DDT in the blood of some patients who are hypersensitive and live in older homes. It has a 50-year half life and could be around for 150 years. It is a very toxic substance and does make people ill. It suppresses the immune system allowing many diseases to emerge. Other ways to control the mosquitoes must be found. This entity has been outlined in many of my textbooks and scientific articles.

William J. Rea, M.D.

Dallas, Texas

1. Hyland CH. Global resurgence of malaria: environmentalism's death toll. *J Am Phys Surg* 2017;22:85-86.

Author's Reply: The direct toxicity to humans (and animals) of pesticides now in use, such as organophosphates, is well-known, immediate, and sometimes deadly. In contrast, scientific evidence of direct DDT toxicity to humans is elusive. Some speakers on the subject, including the late entomologist and World War II veteran Dr. J. Gordon Edwards (who lived into his 80s), have been known to ingest several grams of DDT in front of audiences to illustrate the safety of the chemical.

Since many substances to which humans are environmentally exposed may persist in minute amounts for several years in tissues (especially fat), it would seem difficult to demonstrate that an illness or sensitivity experienced by a patient decades after exposure was due to any specific agent. The half-life of DDT in nature is relatively short (just a few days in ocean water according to an EPA study).

Very small amounts of DDT effectively repel mosquitoes when applied to dwelling entries (such as windows and doors of thatched huts). Perhaps the people in regions where malaria and other infectious diseases are endemic should be given a choice as to whether to have access to DDT. Most parents of babies at risk of dying from malaria would want to protect them and themselves from this rampant and devastating disease, even if there were a possible and remote side effect.

Caryl H. Hyland, M.D.

Gulf Breeze, Fla.



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