

# Pesticides Not Cleared Of Breast Cancer Link

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To the Editor:

You report a study "has found no evidence that breast cancer is caused by pesticide residues that accumulate in body fat" (Health page, April 20). Your claim of "strong evidence" is not shared by the study's authors.

The study, based on small groups of 50 white, black and Asian women with breast cancer, found no significant overall associations between breast cancer rates and blood levels of DDE, a breakdown product and measure of exposure to DDT, and of PCB's. However, higher blood levels found in black women were associated with increased breast cancer risks.

Unfortunately, DDE and PCB levels were measured in blood samples taken as long as 25 years before the diagnosis of breast cancer. No further blood levels were measured. The study also failed to investigate lactation, which is known to result in major mobilization of DDE and PCB's from the breast and reduction of their blood levels. The study failed to inquire and control for family history of breast cancer, adequate data on age at first pregnancy and oral contraceptive use, including age at onset and duration of use, all known to influence breast cancer risks.

Other recent studies make strong associations between breast cancer rates and near contemporaneous DDE blood levels, and between DDE and PCB levels in breast fat from women with breast cancer, as against women with nonmalignant breast disease.

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Chicago, April 25, 1994

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