Pesticides: their inequities and harms to children’s health

An introduction to pesticides
- Pesticides are chemical products derived from fossil fuels that kill pests and diseases, such as weeds, insects, rodents and soil-borne diseases
- About 200 million pounds of pesticides are applied per year in California\(^1\) – 4.5 times the national average\(^2\)
- Pesticides are predominantly used in agriculture\(^3\), and are also used in urban areas, including in nearly 75% of US households\(^4\)

Pesticide exposure threatens children’s health
- Children’s developing brains and bodies are particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of pesticides\(^5\)
- Pesticides exposure has been linked to a wide range of illnesses and diseases in children, including but not limited to: brain tumors and other cancers\(^6\)\(^7\), autism\(^8\), birth defects\(^9\), and respiratory disease\(^10\)
- Rural children are particularly at risk; they experience not only pesticide exposure from residues on food and applications in schools, parks and homes, but they also face exposure when pesticides contaminate water supplies or drift from nearby agricultural fields\(^11\)

Pesticide exposure is a racial injustice
- Research using CalEPA data found that pesticides are one of the top two pollutants in California with the greatest racial and ethnic disparities\(^12\)
- Pesticide health impacts disproportionately affect farmworkers and their families, the majority of whom are Mexican immigrants\(^13\)
- A 2014 Department of Public Health study found that Latinx children are 91% more likely than white children to attend a school near high pesticide use\(^14\)
- Rural Latinx children can also experience socioeconomic stressors that exacerbate health harms from pesticides\(^15\)
Recommendations

- Fix and expand the Department of Pesticide Regulation’s (DPR’s) schools’ regulation
  - DPR began mandating 25 feet to a quarter-mile pesticide buffer zone around schools in 2017. However, the regulation is mostly unenforceable because of a lack of necessary information in farmers’ pesticide use reports. DPR must immediately fix this regulation and expand the buffer zones
- Implement AB 652 (Lee), which would establish an environmental justice advisory committee at DPR, to create structural accountability at DPR to the families that are the most impacted by pesticide exposure
- Adopt meaningful state-wide targets to reduce pesticide use and toxicity – such as mirroring the EU’s target to reduce pesticide use and toxicity by 50% by 2030
- Implement DPR’s Sustainable Pest Management Roadmap
- Increase technical assistance and incentives to farmers to adopt diversified agroecological practices that do not rely on hazardous agrochemicals like pesticides