Once again, the chemical bisphenol A (BPA), found in hard plastics and the linings of cans, has been linked to an increased risk of a health problem: this time asthma in kids. Excess exposure to BPA, which interferes with the body’s production of certain hormones, has already been linked to increased obesity risks in kids and a heightened likelihood of heart disease, diabetes, and kidney disease later in life.

The new research, like dozens of previous studies, measured BPA levels in urine and compared those with rates of a particular illness — in this case, asthma. The study, published Friday in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, found a 40 percent increased risk of asthma in inner city children with the highest BPA levels at
3, 5, and 7 years old. The increased risk was modest but consistent with previous studies linking high BPA levels in pregnant women’s urine with the baby’s risk of developing asthma later on, said study leader Dr. Kathleen Donohue, an allergist and immunologist at the Columbia University School of Physicians and Surgeons.

The study doesn’t prove exposure to BPA causes asthma risk to rise. While researchers took into account certain factors known to affect asthma risk, such as exposure to cigarette smoke, a mother’s history of asthma, and ethnicity, they didn’t control for poor dietary habits and childhood obesity, which may also play a role in asthma risk.

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