

# Pesticide exposure increases cancer risk



JANE HANSEN

PARENTS are being advised to limit their children's exposure to indoor pesticides off the back of new research that shows low levels of household pesticides may increase the risk of developing some childhood cancers.

Harvard School of Public Health researchers reviewed 16 studies done since the 1990s examining the effect of low-level pesticide exposure and found a small but "significant increase in risk of childhood leukaemia and lymphoma".

"We don't know 'how much' exposure it takes, or if there's a critical window in development," Associate Professor Chensheng Lu said.

"Is the window during pregnancy? Or even before pregnancy? That will take a much deeper investigation."

For the study, Lu and his colleagues examined the results from 16 international studies done between 1993 and 2013.

All the studies compared children with cancer to other healthy children.

The study, published in *Pediatrics*, found children were more susceptible to exposure when they played on treated surfaces and then put their fingers in their mouths. The children also had respiratory, stomach, nerve and hormone problems tied to pesticides.

Terry Slevin, chair of the Cancer Council's occupational and environmental cancer committee, said parents should take a cautious approach when using pesticides and herbicides around the home.

"It's a good idea to minimise exposure ... these chemicals are designed to kill living organisms. We need to reinforce caution when using chemicals that are designed to kill things, they are poisonous to these organisms so it is wise to assume they won't be good for humans," Mr Slevin said.

The research found children exposed to pesticides were 1½ times more likely to develop cancer.