

CF Trust Statement on Pancreatic Enzymes and Phthalates

Information for people with CF and their families

During a Canadian clinical trial, researchers found unexpected levels of phthalates (pronounced “THA-lates”) in the urine of children with Cystic Fibrosis who were taking pancreatic enzymes. Some of the enzymes people with CF take to digest food and absorb nutrients contain phthalates

Phthalates are a group of chemicals used in many products, including drugs, medical supplies, toys, cosmetics, and personal care products, such as nail polish, hair sprays, soaps and shampoos. In CF care, phthalates are found in the coating used in pancreatic enzymes to allow the medicine to pass through the stomach and be released in the intestine, where nutrients are absorbed. Some research on animals suggests toxic effects from certain phthalates; however these findings may not apply to humans and there is no evidence that phthalates are harmful.

Following discussions with the researchers in Canada who identified this problem and with the CF Foundations in the US and Canada and the European CF Society, the CF Trust offers the following advice in line with colleagues across North America and Europe.

The CF Trust advises that people with CF continue taking their pancreatic enzymes as prescribed by their CF doctor. The known risk of malnutrition from not taking pancreatic enzymes is greater than the potential risk from phthalates.

This recommendation is supported by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which agrees that people with CF should continue taking their pancreatic enzymes because the benefits of better nutrition outweigh any potential risk from phthalates.

We are not aware of any evidence that phthalates contained in the coating of enzymes are harmful to people with Cystic Fibrosis. These enzymes have been used for more than 20 years and help people with CF to have good nutrition. Enzymes are critical for treating Cystic Fibrosis. They are one of the key reasons for the increased life expectancy of people with CF, which has doubled in the past 25 years.

To learn more, read ‘Frequently Asked Questions about Phthalates and Pancreatic Enzyme Products’, which you can find on www.cftrust.org.uk/pressoffice/behindheadlines. If you have more questions, please talk with your CF doctor and CF Centre.