The chemical Bisphenol A, which has been used for years in clear plastic bottles and food-can liners, has been restricted in Canada and some U.S. states and municipalities because of potential health effects. The Food and Drug Administration will soon decide what it considers a safe level of exposure to Bisphenol A (BPA), which some studies have linked to reproductive abnormalities and a heightened risk of breast and prostate cancers, diabetes, and heart disease. (See our video on BPA in plastic baby bottles.)

Now Consumer Reports’ latest tests of canned foods—including soups, juice, tuna, and green beans—found that almost all of the 19 name-brand foods we tested contain some amounts of BPA. The canned organic foods we tested did not always have lower BPA levels than non-organic brands of similar foods analyzed. We even found the chemical in some products in cans that were labeled “BPA-free.”

The debate revolves around just what is a safe level of the chemical to ingest and whether it should be in contact with food. Federal guidelines currently put the daily upper limit of safe exposure at 50 micrograms of BPA per kilogram of body weight. But that level is based on experiments done in the 1980s rather than hundreds of more recent animal and laboratory studies indicating serious health risks could result from much lower doses of BPA.

What we found
We tested for BPA in soup, vegetables, tuna, and other canned products as well as non-canned versions from leading manufacturers such as Campbell’s, Chef Boyardee, Del Monte, Nestlé, and Progresso, among others. Using outside laboratories, we tested three samples of each product, all bought in the New York metropolitan area or online. In all but one case, the three samples were of different lot numbers.

A 165-pound adult eating one serving of canned green beans from our sample, which averaged 123.5 ppb, could ingest about 0.2 micrograms of BPA per kilogram of body weight per day, about 80 times higher than our experts’ recommended daily upper limit. And children eating multiple servings per day of canned foods with BPA levels comparable to the ones we found in some tested products could get a dose of BPA approaching levels that have caused adverse effects in several animal studies.

Given the significance of BPA exposure for infants and young children, we tested samples of Similac Advance Infant Formula and Nestlé Juicy Juice All Natural 100% Apple Juice. Samples of the Similac liquid concentrate in a can averaged 9 ppb of BPA, but there was no measurable level in the powdered version. Samples of the Nestlé Juicy Juice in a can averaged 9.7 ppb BPA, but there were no measurable levels in the samples of the same product packaged in juice boxes.

Although BPA levels in that canned juice were not among the highest in the foods we tested, canned juice can account for a substantial amount of dietary BPA exposure in children who drink a lot of it. Drinking three servings per day of canned apple juice with BPA levels comparable to the levels found in our samples could result in a dose of BPA that is more than our experts’ daily upper limit.

Learn more details about Consumer Reports’ BPA test findings, as well as tips for what consumers can do to avoid BPA.