Plastics link to autism, ADHD

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Exposure to chemicals found in everyday plastics during pregnancy may increase the likelihood of children developing autistic and ADHD traits, research has claimed.

A lengthy study conducted at Florey Institution of Neuroscience and Mental Health claims to have established a link between chemical DEHP and neuro divergent conditions.

Started in 2010, the study focused on 800 Australian families, tracking the families from the mother's pregnancy through to the children's formative years.

Through urine samples taken at late-term pregnancy, researchers ascertained the DEHP exposure levels of the mothers while carrying their children and then followed up with the child to track symptoms of autism and ADHD.

"Our study found infants exposed to higher levels of DEHP before birth showed distinctive changes in DNA methylation – an epigenetic switch that turns genes on and off – in their umbilical cord blood at birth," lead author Sam Tanner said.

The study found that exposure to the chemical likely triggered this "switch", making the gene that produces neurodivergent traits active.