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## Toxic nation, toxic families

By ROBYN STUBBS, 24 HOURS

In the last 50 years, science has invented thousands of chemicals meant to do everything from withstanding fire, resisting stains and keeping your breakfast eggs from sticking to the pan. But what makes your life easier now may end up making your life shorter - made to be indestructible, these chemicals are showing up in alarming numbers in our own bodies, and wreaking havoc on key biological systems.

This week in a four-part series, 24 hours investigates Canada's toxic conundrum.

For some, ignorance is bliss. But a small group of Canadians swallowed their fears and had their blood tested to find out just how many environmental toxins are flowing through their veins.

The study, conducted on behalf of the national environmental group Environmental Defence, looked for specific chemicals in 11 adults across the country last year, and more recently, tested parents and children in five Canadian families.

Amy Robertson and her kids, Johanna, 15, and Satchel, 13, were the lucky family from Vancouver to roll up their sleeves for the test, hoping their healthy lifestyle would have spared them a few of the pollutants - the kids grew up on an organic farm in the Fraser Valley and lived for a time on Cortez Island before settling in Vancouver last year.

But they would have no such luck. Thirty-one pollutants out of 68 were detected in Amy's blood. Her daughter Johanna showed 32 in her sample, and her son, Satchel was polluted with 29 out of the 68 - the second-highest level detected in a child in the study.

"I was pretty shocked. We sat down and had a weeping session after the results came in, but we need to speak out on this issue because it's only getting worse," Amy told 24 hours.

Of particular concern: Although the industrial chemicals known as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were banned in Canada nearly 15 years before Johanna and Satchel were born, both the Robertson kids had PCB levels higher than their mom, and were contaminated with PCBs that weren't present in Amy at all.

"What we found is that most people had most of the pollutants we tested for and in most cases, the kids had higher levels than their parents, which is surprising and incredibly worrisome," says Rick Smith, executive director of Environmental Defence.

"These chemicals are things that are in products in our kitchen, our upholstery, new cars - when people are thinking of pollution, they're still thinking of Victoria pumping raw sewage into the water or smoke stacks pumping black smoke into the air. The reality is that it's a much more insidious, invisible problem."

Environmental Defence has also taken blood from Liberal environment critic John Godfrey, Environment Minister Rona Ambrose, Health Minister Tony Clement and NDP leader Jack Layton to test for 102 toxic chemicals. Those results will be posted at [www.toxicnation.ca](http://www.toxicnation.ca) in the fall.

