

FERTILITY FEARS

Plastics alert for mums-to-be

■ **Cathy O'Leary**
Medical Editor

Pregnant women are being urged to be aware of potential toxins in everyday plastic goods, after research found some chemicals could affect the fertility of their babies.

A study by the University of WA and the Women and Infants Research Foundation suggests that the chemicals phthalate and bisphenol A — found in some food wraps, water bottles, paint,

nappies and make-up — can affect the reproductive organs of unborn babies, possibly by raising the mother's level of the hormone oestrogen.

Initial results suggest higher levels can cause girls to go into puberty early and have smaller ovaries. The study found that if pregnant women had higher levels of oestrogen at the time of childbirth, male babies were more likely to have a lower sperm count as adults.

Data came from the Raine

study, one of the world's biggest pregnancy and childhood development research projects.

Although Australian food safety regulators say there is no evidence that bisphenol A, or BPA, is used at levels likely to cause harm, most baby bottle manufacturers have phased out the chemical since 2010.

UWA professor of reproductive medicine Roger Hart said pregnant women should not be unnecessarily anxious about using plastic products but it was wise to

limit their exposure to potential toxins.

"Phthalates and BPA are endocrine-disrupting chemicals which can interfere with the action of hormones that regulate our daily internal environment and control our growth and development," he said.

"We can't eliminate all environmental toxins, but it is possible to minimise our exposure to them, by using alternatives to plastic wrap and water bottles."

Nina Bone of Lathlain, who is

24 weeks pregnant, was keen to hear about the research.

"As a mum-to-be, I want to give my baby the best chance in life, and if there are simple things I can do in my pregnancy such as changing my water bottle, then I might as well do them," she said.

Professor Hart will discuss his research at the Forever Project's Food Theatre evening at Perth Zoo on March 27. It includes a meal, with part proceeds going to the research. Details at wirf.com.au/foodtheatre.



Concerns: UWA professor of reproductive medicine Roger Hart and Nina Bone. Picture: Mogens Johansen/The West Australian