Teratogen Encyclopedia Article

Teratogen

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Teratogen

An environmental agent that can cause abnormalities in a developing organism resulting in either fetal death or congenital abnormality. The human fetus is separated from the mother by the placental barrier, but the barrier is imperfect and permits a number of chemical and infectious agents to pass to the fetus. Well known teratogens include (but are not limited to) alcohol, excess vitamin A and retinoic **acid**, the rubella **virus**, and high levels of **ionizing radiation**. Perhaps the best known teratogenic agent is the drug thalidomide, which induced severe limb abnormalities known as phocomelia in children whose mothers took the drug.

See Also

Birth Defects; Environmental Health; Mutagen