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# Pesticides: Ban on a Cousin of DDT Has Loopholes in India, Where Children Were Harmed

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Endosulfan, a powerful 50-year-old [insecticide](#) sometimes called DDT's "cousin," was officially banned last week at an international [pesticides](#) meeting in Geneva. Partial exemptions were created for India, however; the chemical may be used on some crops there for up to 10 years.

Many countries outlawed endosulfan long ago because it is dangerous to farmworkers, accumulates in the body, kills beneficial insects and persists in the environment. The United States is an exception: Until last year, small amounts were still sold, as Thionex. But last June, after the [Environmental Protection Agency declared](#) it a threat to people and wildlife, the only remaining importer agreed to stop distribution.

In India, endosulfan is ubiquitous and controversial. It is blamed for deforming hundreds of children in the southern state of Kerala whose parents worked on cashew plantations. [Pictures](#) of them are common there, reminiscent of "[thalidomide babies](#)" in the 1950s and victims of mercury poisoning in [Minamata, Japan](#).

But India's agriculture ministry has resisted global pressure to drop endosulfan, arguing that crop prices will rise because there are no cheap alternatives. Blaming past illegal overuse for Kerala's problems, some industry executives claim environmentalist pressure is a plot by Western chemical companies to hobble the Indian market. Meanwhile, in Kerala, demonstrators calling last week for an immediate ban closed trains and businesses.