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Basal Ti level in the human placenta and meconium and evidence of a materno-foetal transfer of food-grade TiO₂ nanoparticles in an *ex vivo* placental perfusion model

Guillard A¹, Gaultier E¹, Cartier C¹, Devoille L², Noireaux J³, Chevalier L⁴, Morin M⁵, Grandin F¹, Lacroix MZ⁶, Coméra C¹, Cazanave A¹, de Place A⁵, Gayrard V¹, Bach V⁷, Chardon K⁷, Bekhti N⁸, Adel-Patient K⁸, Vayssiére C^{5,9}, Fisicaro P³, Feltin N², de la Farge F¹, Picard-Hagen N¹, Lamas B¹, Houdeau E¹

1. *Toxalim UMR1331 (Research Centre in Food Toxicology), Toulouse University, INRAE, ENVT, INP-Purpan, UPS, Toulouse, France*
2. *Department of materials, LNE, Trappes, France*
3. *Department for biomedical and inorganic chemistry, LNE, Paris, France*
4. *Group Physic of Materials, GPM-UMR6634, CNRS, Rouen University, Rouen, France*
5. *Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Paule de Viguier Hospital, CHU Toulouse, Toulouse, France*
6. *INTHERES, Toulouse University, INRAE, ENVT, Toulouse, France*
7. *Péritox UMR-I 01 (Perinatality and Toxic Risk), Jules Verne University, Amiens, France*
8. *Université Paris Saclay, CEA, INRAE; Département Médicaments et Technologies pour la Santé (DMTS), SPI, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette, France*
9. *UMR 1027 INSERM, Team SPHERE, Toulouse III University, Toulouse, France*

Titanium dioxide (TiO₂) is broadly used in common consumer goods, including as a food additive (white pigment, E171 in Europe). The E171 contains TiO₂ nanoparticles (NPs), partly absorbed in the bloodstream and accumulating in several systemic organs^{1,2}. Prenatal exposure to TiO₂-NPs in rodents resulted in alteration of placental functions and a materno-foetal transfer, with toxic effects on the foetus³. However, no human data are available for the potential materno-foetal transfer of food-grade

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TiO₂-NPs. We analysed Ti(O₂) content of human placentae at term and meconium (first stool of newborns) using inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) and scanning transmission electron microscopy (STEM) coupled to energy-dispersive X-ray (EDX) spectroscopy. Using an *ex vivo* placenta perfusion model, we also assessed the transplacental passage of food-grade TiO₂ particles.

ICP-MS analysis evidenced the presence of Ti in all placentae (0.01 to 0.48 mg/kg of tissue) and in 50% of the meconium (0.02-1.50 mg/kg), suggesting a materno-foetal transfer of Ti. STEM-EDX observation confirmed the presence of TiO₂-NPs in placental tissues and meconium, in addition to iron, tin, aluminium, silicon and zinc. In placenta perfusion experiments, confocal imaging and SEM-EDX analysis of foetal exudate confirmed a low transfer of food-grade TiO₂ particles to the foetal side, barely quantifiable by ICP-MS, with 70% to 100% of the TiO₂ particles < 100 nm.

Altogether, these results show a materno-foetal transfer of TiO₂ particles, food-grade TiO₂ being a potential source for foetal exposure to NPs. These data emphasize the need for risk assessment of chronic exposure to TiO₂-NPs during pregnancy.

References (max. 5):

1. Pele et al. 2015
2. Heringa et al. 2018
3. Rollerova et al. 2015

Acknowledgment: