

**Monday, May 8, 2006 – Cover Story of the Health Section**

## **Crib notes for parents**

By Diana McKeon Charkalis, Lifestyle Editor

When Laura Forbes Carlin was pregnant, she bought a crib mattress covered in vinyl. She immediately stashed it in a closet until it was time to assemble the nursery.

She was taken aback when she opened the door a few weeks later and discovered an unpleasant, chemical smell emanating from the object on which her newborn would soon rest his head.

"If something smells toxic, chances are it's not good for your baby to breathe," says Carlin, who ultimately opted for more organic options in her baby's room and also went on to write "The Peaceful Nursery: Preparing a Home for Your Baby with Feng Shui" (Delta; \$15).

In the book, she and co-author Alison Forbes, who is also her sister, discuss not only design and decorating tips in accordance with feng shui, but also more eco-friendly, healthier options for babies' rooms.

Although the Los Angeles authors say it's best to plan ahead before a baby is born, they say it's possible to take simple steps, even afterward, to make a baby's (and new mom's) space a healthier place to be and to breathe.

"One of the first things people think about is how the room should look. But it's silly to have a beautiful room that doesn't support your health," says Alison Forbes. "We don't want to overwhelm people. Everybody needs to find a balance that's right for them.

Here's a "timeline" look at ways to create a more healthy nursery:

### **Before conception**

Planning to have a baby? This is a great time to think about floors and walls in the room where the infant may sleep. The authors suggest identifying any materials that could contain toxins, such as synthetic carpets, pressed wood and ó in houses built before 1978 ó lead-based paint.

If possible, opt for wood floors over wall-to-wall carpet. "(Carpet) can emit chemicals and also trap dust and dust mites," Carlin says.

When painting walls, the safest options are low-VOC (volatile organic compound) or no-VOC paint, which contain fewer toxins. Or, try milk-based paints, which are well-tolerated by people with chemical sensitivities. Companies including Benjamin Moore and Sherwin Williams now offer these low-chemical lines. **During pregnancy** If you're pregnant and haven't painted the room yet, don't do it yourself, the authors