Traces of DDTs still present
Reducing the presence of POPs in the body system is not as easy a matter as losing fat. There are no short-term measures, said Dr Mustafa.

"There's nothing that we can do to stop it totally and immediately. It's a long-term job. Proper waste disposal measures should be practised. For example, you cannot just throw placenta out. They are supposed to be recycled and not used. The public must be made aware of this.

"I'm not saying that you cannot be exposed to contaminants at all. People have survived for so long with a certain amount of exposure.

"There are certain criteria for the chemicals to exert their effects. Like the time of exposure.

"But we don't know when these chemicals in the mother's body will be exposed to at which stage of the baby's development. That is where the danger lies."

In Malaysia.

Milk from one mother contained dioxin levels as high as the average value in Japan, implying that some residents may be exposed to specific pollution sources of dioxins, such as open dump sites.

The effects of dioxins on children are related to mental and psychomotor development, said Ahmad.

The research concluded that contamination by organochlorine pesticides is a major environmental problem in the population.

The daily intake by some infants exceeded the limit set by the World Health Organisation and Health Canada.

Due to its small sample size, the research could not establish the link between consumption of foodstuffs and sources of contaminants.

However, Dr Mustafa, who has produced similar results using breast milk and umbilical cord blood taken from the University Malaya Medical Centre in his research, said mothers could have been exposed through their daily diet.

When chemicals from industrial, agricultural and domestic waste are disposed of, they will be washed by rain into the sea and eventually end up in streams and rivers, he said.

The Selangor river and dam, in a separate research, have both been found to contain pesticide residues, some of which are POPs, due to intensive agriculture and urban activity.

River water provides about 98 per cent of the country's water requirements.

"If you throw rubbish into your house, you think it will not harm you. But this rubbish will just come back to you in bottled drinks," said Dr Mustafa.

Filtering water does not help, he said, but one will not die from drinking contaminated water because the chemicals come in very small amount.

They are small-free, tasteless and odourless, rendering them undetectable.

However, some chemicals are more soluble in fat and tend to accumulate in body parts with a lot of fat, like the breasts, rather than being flushed out of the system.

"When the mother is pregnant, the breast's fat of milk, which is also fat. So the first few times when the mother feeds the baby, especially the first child, the milk might contain a lot of contaminants like pesticides."