



Questions and Answers

Scent/Fragrance-Free



Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)

Empowering Community and Removal of Barriers (ECRoB) Project

The term 'scent-free/fragrance-free' includes products without scents, fragrances, perfumes, colognes, essential oil, incense, and masking agents, and are lowest-emission and least-toxic.

What are perfumes?

Perfumes are mixtures of various chemicals designed to create specific scents. A single perfume may contain anywhere from 50 to 300 ingredients. 95% of the ingredients contained in perfumes are petroleum-based volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that easily evaporate and disperse into the air we breathe. Many of these VOCs are known respiratory irritants. When these chemicals volatilize into the air, they can affect up to 30% of Canadians, leading to symptoms like headaches, nausea, coughing, or skin rashes. Some individuals, up to 4%, may even experience asthma attacks. These perfumes can pose a significant health risk to cardio-respiratory patients.

What symptoms can people experience when exposed to perfumes?

The most common symptoms associated with perfume exposure include asthma symptoms like wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath, as well as grogginess, difficulty concentrating, runny or stuffy noses, migraine headaches, rashes, watery eyes, fatigue, and eczema. The same perfume can cause different symptoms in different people, and symptoms can vary in severity.

Why must a healthcare facility go perfume-free?

Health care facilities are committed to the health and well-being of patients, staff, and visitors. Using perfumed products can have adverse effects on individuals with sensitivities and respiratory issues, potentially making them sicker.

How can I change to perfume-free?

Becoming perfume-free is a process that involves changing all your products, including for laundry, to perfume-free alternatives. For those who have always used perfumes, it may take multiple washes to completely remove perfumes from laundry.

Can people have a reaction to scented products? Is this even possible?

Yes, over one million people in Canada have been diagnosed with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), and scents/perfumes are a major trigger for their symptoms. Asthma is also on the rise, particularly among young people, and it can be triggered by chemical exposures.



Are sensitivities the same as allergies?

Sensitivities to fragranced products can cause symptoms similar in type and severity to allergies. While there is no medication to relieve these symptoms for people who experience sensitivities, avoiding exposure is the best strategy.

Do I not have the right to use whatever product I choose?

You have the right to choose products, just as people have the right to smoke. However, using fragranced products affects others' health, especially in shared spaces.

Will perfume-free products cause poor hygiene and body odour?

Perfume-free products are highly effective and do not cause poor hygiene or body odor. They are a healthier choice for both individuals and the environment.

Where will I find these perfume-free products?

Perfume-free products are readily available in personal care, laundry, cleaning, and even some renovation products like zero VOC paints. You can find them online, at grocery stores, pharmacies, and health food stores. Ensure that the ingredient list is short and does not contain "scent," "parfum," "perfume", or "fragrance". Choose products with certified eco-logos.

What is the difference between perfume-free, scent-free, and unscented?

These terms are used in the industry, but even products labeled "scent-free" or "unscented" can contain chemicals used to mask or hide scents. Individuals react to the chemicals, not just the smell. Therefore, it's crucial to read labels, and if "parfum," "perfume," or "fragrance" is listed as an ingredient, it's best to avoid the product. Choose "fragrance-free" products.

What if I wear a light scent within arm's length? Will that be okay?

No. Even "light" scents can contain a substantial number of chemicals and can affect others in shared spaces. These chemicals can linger in the environment, leading to potential health issues for individuals who react to perfumes. For example, the scent can linger in elevators or in other shared spaces.

Is it also important to have perfume-free, least toxic cleaning products in buildings?

Using perfume-free and least toxic cleaning products is vital for the health of individuals and the environment, making them suitable for use in health care facilities and public spaces.

Is it possible to make a public building, like a hospital, scent-free?

Education, awareness, effective signage, including a monitored and enforced scent-free policy in public buildings can significantly reduce fragrance-related incidents over time.

What can a healthcare facility do to ensure that patients and visitors do not wear perfumes to the hospital?

Health care facilities can inform patients and visitors about scent-free policies through various means, including telephone voice mail messages, advising patients in advance, providing visible signage, making pamphlets readily available, and a website with guidance on how to choose appropriate scent/fragrance-free products. All of these proactive actions will help to create awareness and encourage compliance with the policy.

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