



Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec  
Environmental Health Association of Québec

## ECO-JOURNAL

May 2024

### Understanding Chemical Sensitivity and Fragrance Exposure

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is a chronic condition affecting over a million Canadians, characterized by heightened sensitivity to chemicals found in everyday products. For individuals with MCS, exposure to fragrances and other chemicals can trigger debilitating symptoms, making it crucial to raise awareness about the impact of these substances. In this article, we delve into the notion that deliberately using chemicals, particularly fragrances, around individuals with MCS amounts to a form of assault. Additionally, we must collectively explore strategies for individuals with MCS to mitigate these assaults and advocate for their rights.

MCS is a complex medical condition characterized by adverse reactions to low levels of chemical exposure. Common symptoms include headaches, fatigue, dizziness, respiratory issues, and cognitive impairment, among others. Fragrances, found in perfumes, air fresheners, and personal care products, are frequent triggers for individuals with MCS. Despite its prevalence, MCS is often misunderstood and marginalized, leading to inadequate support and accommodations for affected individuals.

Can deliberately exposing individuals with MCS to fragrances be considered a form of assault due to the significant harm it causes? Fragrances contain a myriad of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and other chemicals known to





trigger adverse reactions in those with MCS. For individuals with this condition, exposure to fragrances can result in severe physical symptoms, compromising their health and well-being. Moreover, the intentional use of fragrances in proximity to individuals with MCS disregards their right to a safe and healthy environment, exacerbating their suffering.

There are precedents supporting the notion that [deliberate exposure to substances causing harm can constitute assault](#). Does this also apply in cases where individuals knowingly expose others to fragrances despite being aware of their sensitivity? Could legal action be pursued under assault laws? Efforts to establish legal protections and accommodations for individuals with MCS are essential to address such issues.

Advocacy plays a crucial role in raising awareness about MCS and combating the adverse health effects of exposure to fragrances. Advocacy efforts should include educating the public about MCS, promoting fragrance-free policies in public spaces, and advocating for legal protections against chemical exposure that triggers symptoms. Additionally, individuals with MCS can empower themselves by communicating their needs and advocating for accommodations in various settings, such as workplaces, schools, and healthcare facilities.

Does deliberately exposing individuals with MCS to fragrances constitute a form of assault, considering the severe harm it inflicts on their health and well-being? As awareness of MCS grows, it is imperative to advocate for the rights of affected individuals and implement policies that prioritize their safety and accessibility. By raising awareness, promoting fragrance-free



environments, and advocating for legal protections, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive society for individuals with MCS.