



Fact Sheet

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)

Misconceptions



Empowering Community and Removal of Barriers (ECRoB)

Misconception: Multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) is not a real illness, and it's all in the person's head.

Fact: MCS is recognized as a disability and a medical condition by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and the World Health Organization (WHO) classifies it as a chronic multisystem disorder. Additionally, multiple studies have demonstrated biological markers for sensitization of certain receptors on cells that provoke symptoms upon exposure to chemicals contained in perfumes, colognes, scented and other products in people with MCS. (Molot et al., 2023)

Misconception: People with MCS are just overly sensitive or allergic to everyday products and chemicals.

Fact: MCS is not a simple allergy or sensitivity. It is a complex disorder that can cause severe and debilitating symptoms, even in response to low-level exposures to chemicals and substances that most people are not affected by. (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2007)

Misconception: MCS can be cured by avoiding certain products or chemicals.

Fact: While reducing exposure to triggers can alleviate some symptoms, there is currently no known cure for MCS. Even a small exposure to a trigger can cause a reaction in someone with MCS.

Misconception: MCS is a rare condition.

Fact: MCS is more common than people may think, and its prevalence is increasing in Canada. (CCHS, 2000-2020)

Misconception: People with MCS are just being difficult or demanding special treatment.

Fact: People with MCS are requesting disability accommodations in order to participate fully in society, including accessing workplaces, public spaces, and other activities. Accommodations for this disability require appropriate product choices, including the use of fragrance-free, lowest-emission, and least-toxic products and ecological strategies for everyday living. These accommodations are protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Misconception: MCS is not a disability.

Fact: MCS is recognized as a disability, and protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act, as it can significantly impact a person's ability to participate fully in society.

Misconception: MCS is caused by mental health issues.

Fact: MCS is not caused by mental health issues. While the stress of living with any chronic

condition, such as cancer or Parkinsons, can lead to anxiety and depression, they are not the cause of the chronic condition. Similarly, mental health conditions are not the cause of MCS.

References:

Molot et al., (2023). Multiple chemical sensitivity: It's time to catch up to the science. *Neurosci Biobehav Rev.* 2023 Aug;151:105227. Doi: 10.1016/j.neubiorev.2023.105227. Epub 2023 May 10. PMID: 37172924.

Molot J, Sears M, Marshall LM, Bray RI. Neurological susceptibility to environmental exposures: pathophysiological mechanisms in neurodegeneration and multiple chemical sensitivity. *Rev Environ Health.* 2021 Sep 16;37(4):509-530. doi: 10.1515/reveh-2021-0043. PMID: 34529912.

Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). (2000 - 2020)

Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC). (2007).

This tipsheet is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Consult with a healthcare professional for personalized guidance and treatment options for your situation.