

Summer Challenges for Individuals Living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)

When we think of summer, we often think of warm weather, travel, spending time outdoors, and having fun. However, the warmer months can present a distinct set of challenges for people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), substantially affecting their comfort, health, and ability to engage in daily activities.

Exposure to many typical environmental triggers can increase as temperatures rise. Public areas can be challenging to navigate due to the increased use of air fresheners, cleaning agents, insect repellents, fragrances, sunscreen, and pesticides. When chemical exposures are widespread, outdoor events, parks, beaches, patios, and even medical institutions may become less accessible for people experiencing MCS and other health conditions.

Air Quality Concerns

In Canada, concerns over poor air quality and wildfire smoke are also becoming more prevalent. Smoke can have negative health effects even for those who do not live near active fires. For people with MCS, exposure to smoke, particulate matter, and other airborne pollutants can trigger symptoms and limit their ability to spend time outdoors.

Chemical Emissions

The heat itself can be problematic. Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from consumer goods, automobiles, furniture, and building materials may be released more readily at higher temperatures. In the summer, chemical odours that might not be as noticeable in the cooler months can intensify, raising the possibility of reactions.

Travel Challenges

It can be hard for people with MCS to travel. Hotels, public transportation, rental vehicles, and shared accommodations aren't always scent-free. Exposures from people wearing fragranced products and cleaning chemicals may be difficult to avoid. People with MCS often need to spend extra time researching accommodations, requesting fragrance-free environments, and planning for potential exposures before leaving home. As a result, what should be an enjoyable opportunity to rest and relax can instead become a complex and stressful undertaking.

Community Events and Social Participation

Additional obstacles may arise from community gatherings and festivities. Exposure to perfumes, scented personal care products, smoke, and cleaning chemicals can be unpredictable and uncontrollable in crowded settings such as festivals, concerts, outdoor markets, and sporting events. Because of this, individuals may decide to participate less or avoid events altogether.

Strategies for a Safer Summer

To face these challenges, the following strategies can help create a safer summer for everyone:

- Check the local air quality forecast before going outside
- Keep a mask on hand or other protective gear that suits your needs
- To find out about accommodations and fragrance-free policies, contact venues, hotels, or event organizers in advance.
- Schedule your activities for times of day when air pollution and temperatures are lower.
- Promote lowest-emission, fragrance-free environments at public gatherings, community areas, and workplaces.
- Maintain relationships with family, friends, and community organizations that are supportive and understanding

It should be possible for everyone to enjoy summer. We can contribute to the development of communities where everyone has the opportunity to participate fully and safely by raising

awareness of the obstacles faced by people with MCS and by encouraging fragrance-free, accessible, and healthy environments. At EHAC-ASEC & ASEQ-EHAQ, we're advocating for policies and procedures that reduce hazardous environmental exposures and doing our best to raise awareness of MCS. By working together, we can create a future in which everyone has access to healthier indoor and outdoor environments and clean air.