

One in three Australians report health problems from fragranced consumer products

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

A University of Melbourne researcher has found that one-third of Australians report health problems—ranging from migraine headaches to asthma attacks—when exposed to common fragranced consumer products such as air fresheners, cleaning products, laundry supplies, and personal care products.

The research was conducted by Anne Steinemann, Professor of Civil Engineering and Chair of Sustainable Cities, from the University of Melbourne School of Engineering and published in the journal *Preventive Medicine Reports*.

When exposed to fragranced products, 33 per cent of Australians suffer [adverse health effects](#), such as breathing difficulties, headaches, dizziness, rashes, congestion, seizures, nausea, and a range of other physical problems.

The results mirrored those from similar research Professor Steinemann conducted in the United States, which found 34.7 per cent of people experienced health problems when exposed to fragranced products.

"This is an epidemic," Professor Steinemann said. "Fragranced products are creating health problems across Australia. The effects can be immediate, severe and potentially disabling," she said. "But they can also be subtle, and people may not realise they're being affected."

Professor Steinemann conducted a nationally representative population survey in Australia, using a random sample of 1098 people from a large, web-based panel held by Survey Sampling International (SSI).

The research found 7.7 per cent of Australians have lost workdays or a job in the past year due to illness from fragranced product exposure in the workplace, and 16.7 per cent want to leave a shop or business as quickly as possible if they smell [air fresheners](#) or other fragranced

products.

"These findings have serious implications for businesses, workplaces, care facilities, schools, homes and other places - for anywhere or anyone that uses fragranced products," Professor Steinemann said.

Professor Steinemann's previous research showed fragranced products emit a range of chemicals, including hazardous air pollutants, but ingredients do not need to be fully disclosed on the product label or safety data sheet.

"All types of fragranced products tested—even those with claims of 'green,' 'organic,' and 'all-natural'—emitted [hazardous air pollutants](#)," she said.

Her research continues to investigate why fragrance chemicals are causing health problems, and the implications for indoor environments. "As my study found, about twice as many Australians would prefer that workplaces, [health care facilities](#) and professionals, hotels, and aeroplanes were fragrance-free rather than fragranced," said Professor Steinemann.

More information: Anne Steinemann, Health and societal effects from exposure to fragranced consumer products, *Preventive Medicine Reports* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.11.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.11.011)

Provided by University of Melbourne

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