

Common chemical products making Australians sick, study finds

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"Multiple Chemical Sensitivities is a serious disease that is often caused and worsened by exposure to petrochemical sources such as pesticides, solvents, new building materials and fragranced items," Professor Steinemann said. Credit: Pixabay

New research reveals almost one in five (18.9 per cent) Australians report chemical sensitivity, with more than one-third (6.5 per cent) medically diagnosed with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS), suffering health problems from exposure to common chemical products.

The study, conducted by Anne Steinemann, Professor of Civil Engineering and Chair of Sustainable Cities at the University of Melbourne, was published in the journal *Preventive Medicine Reports*. Professor Steinemann is an international expert on environmental pollutants, air quality and [health](#) effects.

"Multiple Chemical Sensitivities is a serious disease that is often caused and worsened by [exposure](#) to petrochemical sources such as pesticides, solvents, new building materials and fragranced items," Professor Steinemann said.

"Even low-level exposure can inflict a range of adverse health effects such as migraines, breathing difficulties, cognitive impairment, seizures and asthma attacks."

Using an online survey with a national random sample of 1098 people, the study found MCS is widespread in the Australian population, affecting an estimated one million adults nationwide, with chemical [sensitivity](#) affecting a further two million.

The study also found 74.6 per cent of people with MCS are asthmatic, and 91.5 per cent with MCS report health problems from fragranced products, such as air fresheners and deodorizers, laundry products, candles, cleaning supplies, and personal care products.

For 55.4 per cent of people with MCS, the severity of these [health problems](#) can be disabling. In addition, 52.1 per cent of Australians with MCS lost work days or a job in the past year due to illness from fragranced products in the workplace.

The results mirror Professor Steinemann's earlier research in the United States that found one in four Americans suffer from chemical sensitivity, prompting calls to reduce exposures to everyday [chemical](#) pollutants.

"While Australia is not yet at the same levels as the US, it appears we're on the same pollution path," Professor Steinemann said.

Professor Steinemann recommends choosing products without any fragrance, and implementing fragrance-free policies in workplaces, health care facilities, schools and other indoor environments.

"The products that are problematic for people with MCS are also major sources of air pollutants. Reducing your use and exposure to these products benefits not only your own and other people's health, but also the environment," she said.

More information: Anne Steinemann. Prevalence and effects of multiple chemical sensitivities in Australia, *Preventive Medicine Reports* (2018).
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