

What can I do to prevent harming people affected by scents?

You can adopt scent-free practices by avoiding using perfumes, aftershaves, colognes, and scented lotions and opting for "fragrance-free", "scent-free", or "unscented" versions of hand and body lotions, soaps, hair products, deodorants, and laundry and home cleaning products. Many scent-free personal care products can be found at your local grocery store or pharmacy.

I know people who have allergies to certain foods or animals. I do not know anyone who has a reaction from coming into contact with scented products. How real is this concern?

It is very real. It is well documented that the incidence of asthma is on the increase, especially in young people. In fact, there are many environmental illnesses triggered by things in our environment. Among the best known are spring and summer allergies to pollen from flowers, grasses, and trees. Another is air pollution from vehicles or smoke which can result in some people not being able to go outdoors on days when the pollution index is rated as high.

It is also known that asthma and migraine headaches have multiple triggers, including chemical exposure. Asthma attacks can be set off by pollen, moulds, extreme cold, dust, and exposure to chemicals, including paint and perfume. Bright light, loud noise, foods such as chocolate, a change in barometric pressure (chinooks), exposure to paint and fragranced cleaning and personal care products can all trigger migraine attacks. It is well known that environmental exposures can cause illness in people with sensitivities.

What is the difference between an allergy and a sensitivity?

An allergy is a condition in which exposure to material prompts the body's immune system to react. It may cause respiratory, skin, or mucus membrane symptoms from mild to very severe. Symptoms can typically be relieved by taking an anti-histamine medication.

Sensitivities to things such as scented products can cause the same type and severity of symptoms. However, there is no medication to relieve the symptoms - the only "treatment" is to avoid exposure.

Isn't the request to adopt scent-free practices intrusive on the individual's right to wear whatever he or she wants?

It may seem at first that asking people to use scent-free personal care products touches on a personal and private matter. But when the scents from these products affect the health and well-being of other people, it then goes beyond just being a matter of private concerns. The goal of scent-free awareness is to prevent harm to others.

Why should I adopt scent-free practices when there isn't anyone in my vicinity who suffers from an allergy or sensitivity? The scented products I use aren't bothering anyone.

Perhaps someone is suffering in silence. Or maybe you will come into contact with someone with an allergy or sensitivity during the day at the gym, in a meeting, at a concert, or in the library. By putting all of the responsibility for coming forward on the person who is most at risk of becoming ill, you increase their chances of having a reaction as they have to approach the person wearing a scent in order to ask that person to refrain from using scented products.

If we ask people to avoid using scented products, perhaps they will stop using personal care products

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Occupational Hygiene (Includes Indoor Air Quality) FAQ

altogether. Could poor hygiene and strong body odour be the result?

Experiences in other places that have implemented scent-free awareness programs have shown that this is not a likely consequence. There are many alternatives to scented personal care products.

How do I find scent-free products?

Going scent-free may not be as difficult as you think. Many brand name personal care items come in "scent-free", "fragrance-free", or "unscented" versions. These are usually available at your local grocery store and pharmacy. They include a wide range of items from hair care, body lotions, and deodorants to laundry and home cleaning products. An easy and cost-free step to becoming scent-free is to avoid wearing perfume or cologne at work or school.

What is the difference between "fragrance free", "scent-free", and "unscented"?

All of these terms are used in industry virtually without restrictions. They may only mean that the product has less scent than the scented version of the same product. Therefore, these terms do not guarantee that a product will not trigger a reaction in someone who has an allergy or a sensitivity. However, choosing products with these labels is safer than choosing the scented versions.

I've heard that it is fine to wear scents, as long as they remain within my "scent-circle" (within an arm's length of me). Is that true?

The "scent-circle" is an idea which sounds good but which does not work very well in the real world. Have you ever stepped into an empty elevator, a hallway or room and been able to tell that the person before you had been wearing perfume or cologne?

As molecules of fragrance chemicals evaporate from your skin, they do not stay within an arm's distance of you. They are picked up by the currents of air that constantly move around us, and the fragrances are dispersed into the atmosphere we all breathe. Fragrances are volatile organic compounds and it's their nature to waft in the air. Even if you sat very still in one place, you could not keep a circle of air containing the fragrance close around you. As well, many environments such as the classroom, theatre or workplace do not allow us to keep an arm's length from others.