

Cleaning Products Can Lead to Asthma Meeting Kit

Adults have asthma caused or aggravated by substances they use or are exposed to at work. This is a condition referred to as “Work Related Asthma” (WRA).

WRA can trigger an asthmatic response in workers who already have asthma or even be the cause of new-onset asthma. The asthma is caused or triggered by substances called asthmagens or sensitizers. The more the body is exposed to an asthagen/sensitizer it becomes more sensitive to it and over time asthma symptoms develop whenever exposure occurs.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRA

There are currently as many as 300 documented asthmagens, with many found in both industrial and household cleaning products. **The only way to treat WRA is to remove the substance, or the worker from the workplace.**

Some respiratory allergies may be set off by fragrances, which are complex chemical mixtures commonly used to scent air fresheners, cleaners, personal care products and other consumer goods. WRA is a major concern in janitorial work. According to a 2010 study by the New York State Department of Health, children born to women who held cleaning jobs while pregnant have an elevated risk of birth defects.

INDOOR AIR QUALITY AND CLEANING

Cleaning may actually spread asthma triggers or worsen your indoor air quality. Some tools like feather dusters only move dust around, which can spread dust mites and small particles through the air. Some vacuum cleaners can leak air, spitting the particles from your carpet right back into the air.

Many cleaning products contain strong scents, chemicals, and

volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that can trigger asthma. One study found that regular use of cleaning products was as harmful as smoking several cigarettes a day. Some products may remove some allergens and asthma triggers but can still irritate your lungs.

Cleaning supplies and products containing VOCs and other toxic substances can include, but are not limited to:

- Air fresheners;
- Chlorine bleach;
- Detergent and dishwashing liquid;
- Dry cleaning chemicals;
- Rug and upholstery cleaners;
- Furniture and floor polish; and
- Oven cleaners.

OTHER HEALTH DANGERS TRIGGERING ASTHMA

Natural fragrances in cleaning products, particularly in air fresheners, may react with high levels of ozone from indoor sources (for example, from some air cleaning devices) or from outdoor air to form formaldehyde, a known human carcinogen, and dangerous fine particles indoors. Ozone is a harmful, but invisible, gas that worsens asthma and other lung diseases. Particles are also common air pollutants that can worsen asthma and other lung diseases and risk heart attacks and stroke. Both ozone and particles can be life-threatening.

- Knick-knacks and other small items on shelves and bookcases can collect dust and trigger asthma. To prevent an increase in dust particles in the air, remove these items and store them somewhere they're safe and won't become a potential threat to your lung health. If you do keep these items on display, dust them regularly to prevent build-up.
- In addition to causing headaches, scented cleaning products can exacerbate some symptoms of COPD or asthma. These scents can cause shortness of breath, dizziness and worsened asthma. To avoid these side effects, steer clear of store-

bought cleaners. But if you do go to buy, look for something without any fragrance.

BEST CLEANING PRACTICES

If you find a product that is causing a reaction, dispose of it immediately. Many of the cleaners we use today that kill molds and bacteria contain pesticides, so read the labels. Know what is in the products you are using and follow the safety instructions. All businesses should have and read the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) on every commercial product that is in use, and use the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

- Wear gloves and goggles to protect your skin and eyes.
- Never mix cleaning products.
- Never use a cleaner at full strength when the instructions say to dilute it.
- Be careful in small rooms or rooms with poor ventilation. Leave windows open and bring in fans to keep the air circulating.
- Use less toxic cleaners whenever possible.
- Using dust masks will not prevent you from breathing fumes from cleaners.
- Never mix bleach or any bleach-containing product with any cleaner containing ammonia.

FINAL WORD

It's best to avoid store-bought cleaners altogether. Even those labeled or certified "green" can still contain ingredients that make lung disease symptoms worse. Though these products do reduce exposure to chemicals, they don't completely eliminate them.