



Playing it safe: Fragrances

Reducing your family's exposure to fragrance chemicals
... for your children's health.

A fragrance is sometimes called a scent or perfume (parfum). Fragrances can be natural, such as the smell of roses or lemons, or human-made, such as the chemicals often added to shampoos, deodorants, air "fresheners," laundry detergents, dryer sheets, cleaners and other products to give them a certain smell.

Some fragrance chemicals may be harmful, particularly to children and to individuals who are sensitive to them. They may trigger itchy or watery eyes, worsening of asthma symptoms and other breathing problems, headaches or other acute effects.

Some chemicals used in fragrances may also contribute to long-term health effects. For example, phthalates, a type of chemical used to make a scent last longer, may interfere with the body's hormone system. Phthalate exposures during pregnancy have been linked to birth defects in male reproductive organs and other adverse effects.

The chemicals in fragrances can be breathed in or absorbed through the skin. They may also settle on food or other objects that a child may put in her mouth.

In Canada, manufacturers are not required to list on product labels the specific chemicals they use to create fragrances. Thus, it can be difficult to make informed choices. Following are some simple tips that can help.

Tips:

- ✓ Avoid wearing perfume, cologne or scented body care products, particularly when pregnant, around children, at work or in public places. And don't use fragranced personal care products on your baby or child.
- ✓ Avoid products with "fragrance" or "parfum" in the list of ingredients. Even products labeled as unscented may contain fragrance chemicals. Check the list of ingredients.
- ✓ Don't use air "fresheners" including sprays, solids, oils, plug-ins, potpourri or incense. Even essential oils may cause problems for sensitive individuals and some may contain added chemicals.
- ✓ Choose fragrance-free laundry detergent and don't use scented fabric softeners or dryer sheets.
- ✓ Avoid strong-smelling cleaning products. Use simple, non-toxic alternatives such as baking soda as a scouring powder for sinks and tubs, and vinegar mixed with water for cleaning floors, surfaces and windows.
- ✓ Avoid scented candles. Natural beeswax candles (unscented) are a safer choice.
- ✓ Avoid buying scented toys or scented arts and crafts supplies (e.g., scented markers).
- ✓ If your child's school or child care centre uses air "fresheners," scented soaps and/or cleaning products, share this fact sheet with the staff and encourage them to explore safer options.
- ✓ While a fragrance-free home is recommended, if you really like fragrances, items from your kitchen can be used to create natural scents. For example, try simmering a few cinnamon sticks, lemon wedges or a mint tea bag in a pot of water on the stove for a few minutes.
- ✓ Make sure the diaper bin and garbage have tight-fitting lids, empty them often and open windows regularly to let in fresh air.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- CPCHE www.gogreenwhenyouclean.ca
- The Lung Association: Indoor Air Quality: Scents. www.lung.ca
- David Suzuki Foundation: Fragrance and Parfum. www.davidsuzuki.org
- Toronto Public Health: Hidden Exposures. www.toronto.ca/health
- The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics. www.safecosmetics.org
- Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care. www.greenhealthcare.ca
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. www.ccohs.ca