

Fragrances are a common public health problem



A survey finds many Americans report health effects from fragrances, including those used by other people.

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In a survey conducted by professor Anne Steinemann, 1136 adult Americans were asked whether fragranced personal care products, laundry products or so-called air fresheners caused any problems for them. A total of 34.7% reported these products caused headaches, migraines, respiratory irritation, or other health effects. 17.7 % were effected so much that they may be covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The following health effects were reported from exposure to fragrances:

Respiratory problems	18.6%
Mucosal symptoms	16.2%
Migraine headaches	15.7%
Skin problems	10.6%
Asthma attacks	8.0%
Neurological problems	7.2%
Cognitive problems	5.8%
Gastrointestinal problems	5.5%

Cardiovascular problems	4.4%
Immune system problems	4.0%
Musculoskeletal problems	3.8%
Other	1.7%

Some people reported more than one health effect.

People reported several problems in public and private spaces:

Problem being near a fragranced person	23.6%
Problem visiting a fragranced store	22.7%
Avoids fragranced stores	20.2%
Problem being in a fragranced room	20.4%
Problem being in a room recently cleaned	19.7%
Avoids public restrooms due to fragrances	17.5%
Have been sick or changed job due to fragrances at work	15.1%
Avoids fragranced soaps in public restrooms	14.1%
Problems with scented dryer exhaust	12.5%

The scented dryer exhaust is a particular problem in the United States where dryer sheets are very common. Dryer sheets are uncommon in Europe and Australia.

Fragrance policies

The survey asked what people thought about policies limiting the use of fragrances in the work place and public spaces, such as pumping it through the air vents.

The following lists how many of the surveyed people (regardless of health effects) would support:

Fragrance-free health care facilities	54.8%
Fragrance-free workplace policies	53.2%
Hotels without scented air supply	55.5%
Airplanes without scented air supply	59.2%

Source

Anne Steinemann is a professor at the University of Melbourne, Australia, the James Cook University, Townsville, Australia and University of California, San Diego.

The full study is *Fragranced consumer products: exposures and effects from emissions*, and was published in the October 2016 issue of *Air Quality and Atmospheric Health*. It is available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11869-016-0442-z>