

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Historical Timeline

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) has been around for a long time. Here is a brief overview of the history.

Keywords: chemical sensitivity, MCS, history

1925: A biography is published about the French author Marcel Proust (1871-1922), revealing he probably had MCS.

1951: Dr. Theron Randolph, an allergist in Chicago, realizes one of his patients is unusually reactive to low levels of chemicals.

1962: Dr. Randolph publishes the book *Human Ecology and Susceptibility to the Chemical Environment*.

1962: Rachel Carson publishes her book *Silent Spring*, about the dangers from pesticides.

1965: The Society of Clinical Ecology is formed as a medical society. It is later renamed American Academy of Environmental Medicine.

1974: Dr. William Rea opens the Environmental Health Center in Dallas, Texas.

1977: The Human Ecology Action League (HEAL) becomes the first MCS patient organization in the United States.

1979: The U.S. Surgeon General states: “There is virtually no major chronic disease to which environmental factors do not contribute, directly or indirectly.” (Healthy People: The Surgeon General’s Report on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, pg. 105.)

1982: The first MCS rental housing opens near Seagoville, Texas. It mostly serves patients at Dr. Rea’s clinic.

1984: Law AB3587 is passed by both houses in the California legislature, but is vetoed by governor Deukmajian after a lobbying effort. It would have funded scientific research on MCS.

1986: The American Academy of Allergy and Immunology publishes a position paper opposing MCS.

1986: California voters pass Proposition 65, which requires labelling of products that contain chemicals known to cause cancer, birth defects or reproductive harm.

1987: Professor Mark Cullen publishes the book *Workers With Multiple Chemical Sensitivities*, which provides the first definition of MCS.

1988: More than a hundred employees at the Environmental Protection Agency's headquarters in Washington, D.C. are sickened when new carpeting is installed in a poorly ventilated building.

1988: The U.S. Social Security Administration adds a section about MCS to its manual for determining disability.

1988: An MCS community is started in Snowflake, Arizona.

1989: The tanker Exxon Valdez creates a massive oil spill in Alaska. Several people hired to clean up the coast get sick with MCS from working with the harsh solvents.

1989: A position statement from the American College of Physicians is dismissive of MCS.

1989: Professors Nicholas Ashford and Claudia Miller produce a report on MCS for the New Jersey State Department of Health.

1989: Marin General Hospital in Marin County, California, opens a new five-story wing which was made less-toxic with input from the local MCS community.

1990: The Indoor Air Quality Act passes the U.S. Senate, but never gets through the U.S. House of Representatives.

1990: Two dozen employees are made permanently sick with MCS after extensive pesticide spraying at a casino in Lake Tahoe, Nevada.

1990: Eleven-year-old Kevin Ryan testifies before a U.S. Senate committee about the lawn-care pesticides that gave him MCS.

1990: The Department of Housing and Urban Development (a United States federal agency) recognizes MCS as a disability requiring “reasonable accommodation.”

1990: The Americans with Disabilities Act is enacted. It provides broad protection for disabled people against discrimination in employment and access to workplaces, public buildings and public places. The law’s broad definition of who qualifies clearly includes people with MCS, but attempts to get the courts to enforce the law prove extremely difficult.

1990: The Chemical Manufacturers Association produces a briefing document for its members, where the consequences of an acceptance of MCS is spelled out.

1990: The American Petroleum Institute and the Chemical Manufacturers Association convene a conference to discuss MCS.

1990: The American College of Allergy and immunology hold their annual conference in San Francisco. One day is dedicated to discussing MCS, with all the scheduled speakers advancing the idea that MCS is purely psychological. The conference is disrupted by demonstrators.

1990-1997: American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) airs a number of TV programs critical of MCS.

1991: More than ten thousand soldiers return from war with Gulf War Syndrome, which appears to be identical to MCS.

1991: United Airlines refuse to let people with MCS board their planes on two different occasions. Both passengers sue and win in court.

1991: The two professors Nicholas Ashford and Claudia Miller publish the book *Chemical Exposures: Low Levels and High Stakes*. (A second edition came out in 1998.)

1992: Dr. Iris Bell proposes her Time-Dependent Sensitization hypothesis for MCS.

1992: The fourth season of the TV series Northern Exposure features a character with MCS.

1993: A clinic catering to people with MCS, AIDS, CFS and other controversial illnesses opens in Queretaro, Mexico. It is operated by physicians who moved from the United States to avoid trouble with the medical boards.

1993: The U.S. Supreme Court issues the Daubert rule which makes it harder to prove “toxic tort,” including MCS.

1994: More than a hundred workers at Boeing in Seattle become sick with MCS when working with toxic chemicals.

1994: Ten scientific articles published in the previous decade suggested MCS was purely psychological. Several of them were frequently mentioned in the press. A review by Davidoff and Fogarty concluded that “only one study reviewed . . . was judged to have fewer than eight methodologic problems . . .”

1994: The American Lung Association, American Medical Association, Environmental Protection Agency and Consumer Product Safety Commission issue a joint statement that MCS “should not be dismissed as psychogenic.”

1994: The world’s first publicly funded MCS housing project, Ecology House, opens in San Rafael, California.

1994: The documentary movie *Final Insult* is produced in Australia, featuring four people with MCS. The movie is mysteriously pulled shortly before its premiere in Melbourne.

1995: Film director Todd Haynes produces the movie *Safe*, which uses MCS to comment on the ongoing AIDS crisis and suburban dystopia. Most reviewers interpret MCS as a psychological illness.

1995: A survey of MCS patients and health providers is conducted across nine European countries.

1995: The Environmental Sensitivities Research Institute (ESRI) is created to “support sound scientific and medical research into environmental intolerance issues, and to compile and disseminate information on those issues.” It was widely considered an industry front created to discredit MCS. It closed around 2008.

1996: An invitation-only MCS conference is held in Berlin. Anti-MCS forces strongly advance a new name, idiopathic environmental intolerance (IEI), to distance the illness from chemical causes.

1996: A government-funded MCS and EHS apartment building is finished in Uppsala, Sweden. It was poorly designed and never became a success.

1996: Dr. William Meggs and colleagues conduct the first large MCS prevalence study on 1,027 people in North Carolina.

1996: Professor William Morton proposes that MCS is linked to the illness porphyria.

1997: Cindy Duehring is awarded the Right Livelihood Award for her MCS advocacy work. She dies two years later from a pesticide exposure at the age of 35.

1997: Professor Claudia Miller names her proposed explanation for MCS Toxicant-induced Loss of Tolerance (TILT).

1998: The San Francisco Police Department adds a page about MCS to its *Disability Awareness Guide*.

1998: The Governors of five American states issue proclamations in support of people with MCS. More join in following years.

1999: Dr. Richard Kreutzer and colleagues publish an MCS prevalence survey on 4,046 Californians.

1999: A consensus criteria for diagnosing MCS is published by 34 physicians in the medical journal *Archives of Environmental Health*. There are six criteria, based on symptoms.

2000: An issue of the Jehovah's Witness magazine *Awake!* is dedicated to MCS. The faith starts modifying some of their churches to accommodate people with MCS.

2000: Halifax, Canada becomes the first major city to restrict fragrances in public places.

2001: The World Trade Center in New York is destroyed by terrorists. The toxic smoke from the burning buildings makes several people sick with MCS.

2005: Anonymous special interests attempt to revoke the licenses of Dr.'s William Rea and other environmental physicians, but have limited success.

2006: The Danish government creates The Danish Research Centre for Chemical Sensitivities. It was funded for eight years.

2007: Professor Martin Pall proposes the NO/ONOO theory to explain both MCS and electrical sensitivities.

2008: The United States Congress passes the ADA Amendments Act that strengthens the Americans with Disabilities Act from 1990.

2008: Hurricane Katrina leaves thousands of families homeless. They are housed in brand new “FEMA trailers” with high levels of formaldehyde. Forty-two percent of the children in a study have respiratory problems.

2008: Susan McBride wins lawsuit against the City of Detroit, which didn’t accommodate her inability to breathe in a fragranced office.

2008: Germany becomes the first country to accept MCS with a diagnostic code. Austria and Japan follow within a year.

2009: The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issues a no-fragrance staff policy.

2011: Copenhagen Airport creates a route so fragrance-sensitive passengers can bypass the perfume counters in the duty-free shopping area. Vancouver and Helsinki follow a few years later.

2013: Filmmaker Susan Abod releases the documentary movie *Homesick*.

2013: An apartment building, specifically built for people with MCS and EHS, opens in Zurich, Switzerland. It is organized as a cooperative with public and private donations.

2014: The Canadian Human Rights Commission issues *Policy on Environmental Sensitivities* in support of accommodating people with MCS.

2015: The American retailer Target publishes a list of hundreds of toxic chemicals it encourages vendors to eliminate from their products.

2016: Walmart, the world’s largest retailer, follows Target’s lead by asking its vendors to remove eight chemicals from their products.

2017: The documentary movie *The Sensitive*, directed by Drew Xanthopoulos, premieres at the Tribeca Film Festival.

2018: A population study by professor Anne Steinemann shows the prevalence of MCS has doubled in a decade and it is easier for men to get a diagnosis than for women.

Other MCS history

See www.eiwellspring.org/history.html