

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.

1947: Dr. Theron Randolph, an allergist in Chicago, realizes one of his patients is unusually reactive to low levels of chemicals.

1953: Dr. Randolph sees a patient who gets sick when eating a commercial apple, but has no trouble with apples that are not treated with pesticides.

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.w

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

1968: The Human Ecology Study Group is formed in Chicago.

1969: The Cuyahoga River in Cleveland is so polluted it catches fire.

1970: President Nixon creates the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

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

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

1978: Residents of the Love Canal neighborhood are evacuated. Their houses were built on top of a toxic waste dump.

1978: A community for people with MCS is started near Wimberley, Texas.

1979: The U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) sponsors a three-day symposium named “Mass Psychogenic Illness.” All but one presenter promotes the idea that MCS is psychosomatic.

1979: The U.S. Surgeon General states: “There is virtually no major chronic disease to which environmental factors do not contribute, directly or indirectly.”

1981: The California Medical Association adopts the position that clinical ecology (treatment of MCS) is not a valid medical discipline.

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

1983: The Los Angeles Times comic Strip *Hello Carol* makes fun of people with MCS.

1984: Law AB3587 is passed by both houses in the California legislature, but is vetoed by governor Deukmejian 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 (The Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act), 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. Indoor air quality problems are extensively covered by the press over the next five years.

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.

1988: Major hospitals in the United States start restricting indoor smoking.

1989: A patron of the Bloomingdale's department store in New York is involuntarily sprayed with perfume by a salesperson and ends up in the hospital for 11 days.

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. It wins the World Health Organization's Macedo Award for Public 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: Two dozen employees are made permanently sick with MCS after extensive pesticide spraying at a casino by 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 Indoor Air Quality Act passes the U.S. Senate, but never gets through the U.S. House of Representatives.

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 seven 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 city of Oakland, California drafts a policy to request people attending public meetings arrive fragrance free. They gave up after being “hammered” by industry lobbyists.

1992: California enacts a law protecting magazine subscribers against scented ads.

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: A Washington State Medical Association official says MCS is “a belief, not a disease. It’s a culturally acquired anxiety disorder, without known cause.”

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, the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the American Medical Association jointly issue the document *Indoor Air Pollution: An Introduction for Health Professionals*, which recommends people offgas new carpets safely and speaks mildly supportive of MCS and Sick Building Syndrome.

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

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.

1995: ESRI hires a public relations firm to place advertorials in newspapers across the United States. They state that MCS “exists only because a patient believes it does and because a doctor validates that belief.”

1996: American Broadcasting Corporation attempts to entrap Dr. Grace Ziem with fake patients posing as having MCS, but the attempt backfires.

1996: The World Health Organization convenes an invitation-only MCS conference 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).

1997: The documentary *Final Insult* is produced in Australia, featuring four people with MCS. The movie is shown to the MCS community but the public release is mysteriously delayed for eight months. It is then displayed on Australian Broadcasting Corporation TV followed by a studio debate between three physicians and a “moderator,” whose bias against MCS is well known. Only one person in the studio has sympathy for people with MCS.

1998: Germany becomes the first country to recognize MCS with a diagnostic code.

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: Brigham and Women's Hospital, a part of Harvard University in Boston, institutes a fragrance policy to improve their indoor air quality.

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: A woman with MCS wore a respirator while visiting a shopping center in Queensland, Australia. Someone thought she was a terrorist and called the police. She had some difficulty convincing the police she was harmless.

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: A woman in Australia is forcefully committed to a mental hospital because of "Fixed belief that she is sensitive to chemicals and electromagnetic forces," according to the paperwork.

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.

2012: An article by researchers at the King's College Psychiatry Department claims that people with MCS just want to retreat from society and live like hermits.

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: Spain becomes the sixth country to officially recognize MCS (after Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Japan, Switzerland and Denmark).

2014: The Danish supermarket chain Irma stops selling products containing fabric softener, chlorine or triclosan (Microban) because they are “unnecessary and damaging to the environment.”

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

2015: German automaker Volkswagen, and later other automakers, are accused of cheating on emissions tests.

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 Sensitives*, 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.

More MCS history

See www.eiwellspring.org/history.html