

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

(adapted from the University of Calgary)

1. What can I do to prevent harming people affected by scents?

You can adopt scent-free practices and avoid using perfumes, aftershaves, colognes, and scented lotions and opting for "fragrance-free", "scent-free", or "unscented" versions of such personal care products. Many scent-free personal care products can be found at your local grocery store or pharmacy.

2. I don't know anyone who has a reaction from coming into contact with scented products. How real is this concern?

It is very real as it is well documented that the incidence of asthma is on the increase, especially in young people. In fact, there are many environmental illnesses – illnesses triggered by things in our environment. Among the best known are spring and summer allergies to pollen, and another is air pollution from vehicles or smoke. For some, it is literally not safe to go outdoors on days when the pollution index is high.

It is also known that asthma and migraine headaches have multiple triggers, including chemical exposure. So it is well known that exposure to materials in the environment can cause illness in people with sensitivities.

3. What is the difference between an allergy and a sensitivity?

An allergy is a condition in which exposure to material prompts the body's immune system to react. It may cause respiratory, skin, or mucus membrane symptoms from mild to very severe. Symptoms may be relieved by taking an anti-histamine medication.

Sensitivity relates to the amount of exposure that is required by an individual to experience some sort of reaction to an irritant. Some people may naturally experience discomfort at levels of exposure that would not bother you or I.

4. Isn't the request to adopt scent-free practices intrusive on the individual's right to wear whatever he or she wants?

At first it may seem that asking people to use scent-free personal care products touches on a personal and private matter. When the scents from these products cause discomfort and/or affect the health and well-being of other people, it then goes beyond just being a matter of private concerns. The goal of this awareness campaign is to inform others of an important issue and to prevent discomfort and/or harm to others.

- 5. Why should I adopt scent-free practices when there isn't anyone in my school, classroom or office who suffers from an allergy or sensitivity? The perfume I wear and the scented products I use aren't bothering anyone.**

Perhaps someone is suffering in silence because they feel uncomfortable about coming forward to discuss the issue. When you think about it, by putting all the responsibility for coming forward on the person who feels the discomfort or who is the most at risk of becoming ill, you increase their chances of having a reaction – they have to approach the person wearing a scent that makes them uncomfortable and/or triggers a reaction in them, in order to ask that person to refrain from using scented products.

- 6. If we ask people to avoid using scented products, perhaps they will stop using personal care products altogether. Could poor hygiene and strong body odour be the result?**

Experience in other places that have implemented scent free campaigns have shown that this is not a likely consequence. There are many alternatives to scented personal care products.

- 7. How do I find scent-free products? ([Scent Free Alternatives](#))**

Going scent-free may not be as difficult as you think. As many brand name personal care items come in "scent-free", "fragrance-free", or "unscented" versions. These are available at your local grocery store and pharmacy and our list of alternatives is a good place to start.

- 8. What's the difference between "fragrance free", "scent-free", and "unscented"?**

All of these terms are used in industry virtually without restrictions. They may only mean that the product has less scent than the scented version of the same product. Therefore, these terms do not guarantee that a product won't trigger a reaction in someone who is sensitive. However, choosing products with these labels may be safer than choosing the scented versions.

- 9. I've heard that it is fine to wear scents, as long as they remain within my "scent-circle" (within an arm's length of me). Is that true?**

The "scent-circle" is an idea which sounds good but which does not work very well in the real world. Have you ever stepped into an empty elevator, a hallway or room and been able to tell that the person before you had been wearing perfume or cologne?

As molecules of fragrance chemicals evaporate from your skin, they do not stay within an arm's distance of you.

10. If Health Canada knows of, tests, and approves, the entire contents of fragranced personal care products, then isn't it perfectly safe to wear them?

Although Health Canada allows these products for use, this in no way provides a guarantee that some people won't have reactions to them. If scented products are making people with allergies and chemical sensitivities sick, then clearly they are unsafe for some and it makes good sense to take reasonable steps to avoid this harm.

11. Don't scent-free campaigns threaten these aspects of personal identity or a personal choice?

While the fragrances from personal care products can be pleasing to some, they also can be unpleasant and even harmful to others. Few would disagree that little pleasure or satisfaction can be derived from learning that these fragrances are causing discomfort and/or harm to other people, especially when could have been avoided.