

Harmful Effects of Man Made Chemicals in Household Products

In a report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of Americans suffering from asthma is increasing significantly and this rise can be attributed to the household cleaning products containing chemicals that can irritate the airways.

From 1950 to 1989, the overall incidence of cancer in the U.S. has risen by 54% (smoking related incidences account for less than 25% of the increase). Childhood cancer is up 50%. Today, cancer is the leading cause of death for women aged 35-74. Some researchers believe that many types of cancer starts 20 years before they are diagnosed. Baby Boomers have three times the cancer rate of their grandparents.

In our daily life we use at least 880 variations of chemical compounds that can be categorized as potential carcinogenic. In this age of over-consumption, Americans are exposed to a far greater number of harmful chemicals than ever in the form of man made products like cleaners, plastics, cosmetics, food and even water.

There are more than 50,000 man made chemicals and everyday we take several of these harmful toxins into our body that can cause adverse health affects including asthma, depression, anxiety, cancer (including breast, ovarian and brain), birth defects and developmental disabilities, as well as reproductive, cardiovascular and immune system disorders.

It is estimated that 15% of American population is suffering with the multiple chemical sensitivity. Gaiam, one of the leading purveyors of green household and lifestyle items, reports that the average American household contains between three and 25 gallons of toxic materials, mostly in the form of household cleaners filled with petrochemical solvents designed to dissolve dirt. It is found that in American houses indoor air is far more polluted than outdoor environment.

Let's have a look at some of the facts related to the chemicals that we use in our everyday life:

- In a research, conducted by [Environmental Working Group](#) (EWG) in collaboration with Commonweal, it was found that out of 287 chemicals detected in umbilical cord blood, 180 cause cancer in humans or animals, 217 are toxic to the brain and nervous system, and 208 cause birth defects or abnormal development in animal tests.
- In 1991 a study performed by the EPA found numerous volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the fragrance products (perfume, cologne, scented lotion, powder etc.) like: acetone, benzaldehyde, benzyl acetate, benzyl alcohol, camphor, ethanol, ethyl acetate, limonene, linalool and methylene chloride that can severely damage central nervous system, kidneys, respiratory system, and other vital organs.

- VOCs are also used in plastics, carpentering, cosmetics and paints that can destroy brain cells, disrupt hormone function and can cause cancer.
- Petroleum based products can cause severe harmful effects to the nervous system and immune system after prolonged exposure.
- Regular use of anti-bacterials like “Triclosan” can create antibiotic-resistant bacteria that cause serious health problems.
- Detergent is one of the most commonly used products but the chemicals that are used in it like buffering agent, stabilizer and brightening agent are potentially harmful. These chemicals can cause allergies and skin and eye irritation. The most harmful chemicals used in detergent are ethylene-based glycol and terpenes that can act as carcinogenic compounds when they mix with environmental ozone.
- Chlorine or sodium hypochlorite, used in the household cleaners, when inhaled can cause serious respiratory disorders.
- Exposure to organophosphate insecticides increases the risk of developmental disorders, including autism.
- Plasticizers or phthalates that are used widely to soften plastics for the manufacturing of children’s toys may pose a risk to the health of youngsters.

Chemical substances that can affect human health are endless and their impact is still not completely known to us but exposure to the chemicals that are present in our environment is suspected to be more harmful than expected.