MCS Task Force

The MCS Task Force of New Mexico is a statewide advocacy organization comprised of chemically sensitive New Mexicans and supporters. The organization is dedicated to increasing awareness of MCS and educating others about the hazards of high and low level chemical exposures.

Resources

Organizations

Multiple Chemical Sensitivities Task Force
505-983-9208 , 505-466-3622

NM Department of Health, Public Health Division
505-827-2389

NM Environment Department
800-219-6157, 505-827-2855

NM Governor's Committee on Concerns of the Handicapped
877-696-1470 (in-state toll free), 505-827-6465

Web Sites

Chemical Injury Information Network
406-547-2255
http://ciin.org

Human Ecology Action League
404-248-1898
http://members.aol.com/HEALNatl/index.html

MCS Referral and Resources
410-362-6400
http://www.mscrr.org

Health & Environment Resource Center
http://www.herc.org

The Healthy Housing Coalition
http://www.herc.org/hhc

NM Department of Health
http://www.health.state.nm.us

Books

Chemical Exposures, Low Levels and High Stakes, Ashford and Miller, 1998.

Casualties of Progress, Alison Johnson, 2000.

Allergic to the Twentieth Century, Peter Radetsky, 1997.

Staying Well in a Toxic World, Lynn Lawson, 1994.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, A Survival Guide, Pam Gibson, 2000.

Prescriptions for a Healthy House, Baker, Elliott, and Banta, 1998.

Videos

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, How Chemical Exposures May be Affecting Your Health, Alison Johnson, 1998.

Environmentally Sick Schools, Doris Rapp, MD, 1994.

CLEAN AIR AWARENESS

Multiple Chemical Sensitivities
Task Force of New Mexico
P.O. Box 23079, Santa Fe, NM 87502
505-983-9208, 505-466-3622

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Multiple Chemical Sensitivities

A look at a growing problem

In collaboration with

New Mexico Department of Health

New Mexico Environment Department

New Mexico State Department of Education

New Mexico Governor's Committee on Concerns of the Handicapped

What Is MCS?

Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS) is a medical condition characterized by debilitating chemical sensitivities. People who are chemically sensitive are made sick by exposures to chemicals found in many common products such as pesticides, perfumes, tobacco smoke, new carpets, air "fresheners," new paint and building materials, and many cleaning and laundry products. Most of these chemicals will make everyone sick at high levels, but for chemically sensitive people exposures to even small amounts of these substances can cause symptoms. Some chemically sensitive people are only mildly affected while others have the more severe form of the illness called MCS.

Who Gets MCS?

MCS is a serious and growing public health problem that affects people of all ages, races, and economic backgrounds. A 1997 survey conducted by the New Mexico Department of Health found that 16% of the state's respondents reported being unusually sensitive to everyday chemicals, like household cleaning products, paints, perfumes and insect sprays, and 2% reported they had been diagnosed with MCS.

What are the Symptoms of MCS?

Symptoms experienced by people with MCS range from mild to life-threatening and include headache, trouble concentrating, nausea, diarrhea, fatigue, muscle and joint pain, dizziness, difficulty breathing, irregular heart beat, and seizures. MCS symptoms in children include red cheeks and ears, dark circles under the eyes, hyperactivity, and behavior or learning problems. After an exposure, symptoms may occur immediately or be delayed for up to a few days. Reactions may last from a few seconds to weeks or months. People with MCS often react to a variety of foods, drugs, molds, and pollen as well as chemicals.

What Causes MCS?

Many people have developed MCS after being exposed to chemicals in a newly built home, recently remodeled office, or following a pesticide or solvent exposure. Others slowly become ill over a period of years.

Creating a Healthier Environment

Reducing exposures to chemicals improves the health of those with MCS. Better air quality also helps promote the health of everyone. The following are ways to create a healthier environment:

- Avoid pesticides, use least toxic integrated pest management (IPM)
- Avoid newly built or remodeled buildings, or build with less toxic materials
- Avoid new paint and solvent-based stains and transparent finishes
- Avoid new carpets
- Avoid gasoline, solvent, dry-cleaning, and tar fumes
- Avoid tobacco smoke and vehicle exhaust
- Use least toxic, natural, and unscented cleaning, laundry, and sanitizing products
- Avoid perfume, cologne, and scented personal care products
- Avoid air "freshener" sprays, incense, and fragrance-emitting devices
- Use electric utilities or radiant heat
- Open windows, ventilate buildings with clean fresh air and/or use portable room air filters

How is MCS Diagnosed?

Physicians diagnose MCS by taking a history, performing a physical examination, and determining whether a person's symptoms come and go in response to chemical exposures. The physical examination may be normal or reveal the presence of rashes, yellowish skin color, ankle swelling, wheezing, irregular heart beat, trouble speaking and communicating, swollen lymph nodes, poor coordination, or tremors. Lab tests that are frequently abnormal in people with MCS include SPECT brains scans, immune studies, quantitative electroencephalograms (qEEG), porphyria tests, and neuropsychological evaluations. These abnormalities indicate there is damage to a person's central nervous system, enzyme functioning, and/or immune system.

How is MCS Treated?

People with MCS report that the most helpful treatment is to avoid exposures to chemicals, foods, and drugs that trigger symptoms. A good place to start is to create a "safe" room in one's home that is as free of triggering substances as possible. There are a variety of other treatments available, such as nutritional supplementation and detoxification and desensitization therapies. Treatment options should be discussed with a physician who is knowledgeable about MCS to decide which may be appropriate for you.

A 1997 survey conducted by the New Mexico Department of Health found that 16% of the state's respondents reported being unusually sensitive to everyday chemicals and 2% reported they had been diagnosed with MCS.

MCS and Disability

MCS is recognized as a potentially disabling condition by the Social Security Administration and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It is covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on a case-by-case basis. This means that employers, schools, hospitals, stores, hotels, and other public places must provide reasonable accommodations to people with MCS who qualify as having a disability under the ADA.