

Air Fresheners – What You Need to Know



Best practices for healthy child care centers



Why be concerned about commercial air fresheners?

- Air fresheners are concentrated sources of fragrances that may contain toxic chemicals.
- Children are uniquely vulnerable to chemical exposures due to their hand-to-mouth behaviors, floor play, and developing nervous and reproductive systems.
- Some chemicals in fragrances, such as phthalates, are endocrine disruptors which mimic or disrupt the body's own hormones.
- Some chemicals in air fresheners are sensitizers that can cause allergies. They can also trigger asthma, wheezing, headaches, and contact dermatitis.
- Elevated levels of cancer-causing chemicals from air fresheners, such as 1,4-dichlorobenzene, have been found in some New Jersey child care centers. This same chemical is also found in moth balls.

What are some guidelines when purchasing air fresheners?

- The hazards of air fresheners are hidden. Like cleaning products, potentially hazardous chemicals contained in fragrances are not required to be listed on the label.
- Look for products that do not have "fragrance" listed as an ingredient (but remember that fragrances are not necessarily listed on the label).
- If the label says "fragrance," it may have phthalates. Most air fresheners (even if labeled "fragrance free") contain phthalates.
- Phthalates are everywhere including in many household products such as scented plastic bags used as diaper pail liners. Therefore, avoid overexposing children by looking for items marked "phthalate-free."

What are some options to using commercial air fresheners?

- Consider making your own homemade air freshener using non-toxic products such as lemon, vinegar, or baking soda.
- Open a few windows, even temporarily, when weather allows.

Natural air fresheners are not any safer. Some of the air fresheners that have tested positive for toxic chemicals were labeled as "all-natural" or "unscented."



References

- [USEPA] Green Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting: A Curriculum for Early Care Education: <https://bit.ly/2IVQppC>
- [ATSDR] Toxic Substances Portal – Phthalates: <https://bit.ly/2DYedpa>
- [USEPA] National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and USEPA Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research Centers Impact Report: <https://bit.ly/2yNAes8>