

PRESS RELEASE

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Cleaning sprays can trigger asthma

London/Zurich, 6 June 2010 - Cleaning sprays, chlorine bleach and disinfectants may be contributing to the rise in asthma at home and work, according to Dr Jan-Paul Zock, an expert in occupational asthma. There is growing evidence that exposure to some cleaning products can provoke respiratory disorders and make existing asthma worse, but that it is preventable.

Associate Professor Zock from the Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology (CREAL) in Barcelona, Spain presented the results from a range of studies into the emerging risks in occupational allergy. He found that professional cleaners employed in a variety of settings, and healthcare workers performing cleaning and disinfecting work, were more vulnerable to asthma. However, it is not clear what the underlying disease mechanisms are that cause these effects on the respiratory system. Dr Zock explained that new studies have now started to characterise cleaning-related asthma using clinical and functional tests and biological markers.

Dr Zock told delegates today at the congress of the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, "The number of people at risk is very large. Not only those who have cleaning jobs or whose work involves cleaning are at risk, but we also need to consider the ubiquitous use of cleaning products at home."

A series of studies has shown that there is an increased rate of asthma amongst janitors, cleaners, housekeepers and nurses. Many cleaning agents are respiratory irritants and some have sensitising properties. Inhalation exposure to bleach, ammonia, decalcifiers or other acids, solvents and stain removers more than once a week was linked to 20% rise in asthma or wheeze. Exposure is determined by frequency and duration of use, the concentration of the active ingredient and how well the room is ventilated.

It is more difficult to pinpoint the link to asthma and wheeze in the home as the exposure to cleaning products is less frequent and more complex to monitor. The population at risk, however, is much larger including those who are already more vulnerable to the effects of chemicals in sprays and cleaning products.

One of the consistent risk factors of chronic respiratory disorders among cleaners is acute inhalation involving strong irritants such as chlorine, typically caused by the of mixing incompatible cleaning products.

Dr Zock called for new studies to assess the effects of exposure to specific chemicals over time and to identify those who are most susceptible to developing asthma or making it worse in order to devise prevention strategies.



"Our research shows that cleaning-related asthma is an important public health issue and it is potentially preventable," he said.

END

Symposium 10

NOTES TO EDITORS

- Dr Jan-Paul Zock, Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology (CREAL), Municipal Institute of Medical Research, Barcelona, Spain jpzock@creal.cat *Please note that Dr Zock is in the UK on 5 and 6 June only.*
- **Publication** Update on asthma and cleaners, 2010 Jan-Paul Zock *Current Opinion in Allergy and Clinical Immunology*
- 150 million people around the world suffer from asthma.

About EAACI:

EAACI - The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology is a non-profit organisation active in the field of allergic and immunologic diseases such as asthma, rhinitis, eczema, occupational allergy, food and drug allergy and anaphylaxis. EAACI was founded in 1956 in Florence and has become the largest medical association in Europe in the field of allergy and clinical immunology. It includes 5'500 individual members from 107 countries, as well as 40 National Allergy Societies.

Throughout 2011, EAACI will develop different activities to celebrate the 100th anniversary of immunotherapy in Allergy, which will aim at increasing the knowledge in this field among healthcare professionals, increase awareness in the general population, and finally, promote the availability of immunotherapy for allergic patients.

EAACI 2010 Press Center

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