

LANGARA COLLEGE

Scent and Odour-Free Environment Guideline: FAQs

I don't know anyone who has a serious reaction to scented products and odours. How real is this concern?

The chemicals in scents enter our bodies through our skin and lungs. Even products containing natural plant extracts have the potential to cause harmful reactions. According to the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#), reactions may include:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Insomnia
- Malaise
- Confusion
- Loss of appetite
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Numbness
- Skin irritation
- Upper respiratory symptoms
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty with concentration

Although the severity of symptoms can vary from individual to individual, it's critical that Langara College maintains a safe campus for those with environmental allergies and sensitivities.

What is the difference between an allergy and a sensitivity to scents and odours?

An **allergy** causes the body's immune system to react or respond in an extreme and inappropriate manner. Exposure to certain scents or odours may cause irritation to the skin (e.g. swelling, hives, or rashes), or affect the respiratory system, to the point where breathing may be severely compromised. A **sensitivity** is a less severe or life threatening reaction or response of the body's immune system. Although adverse reactions may still occur when a person is exposed to chemicals in their environment, they can typically be managed or limited.

This guideline aims to assist those with environmental allergies and sensitivities; the goal here is not to accommodate for personal preferences, but to reduce the health risk for those who may respond to exposure.

What can I do to help those who are affected by scents and odours?

- Switch to using "fragrance-free," "scent-free," or "unscented" versions of your hygiene products
- Avoid the use of perfumes, colognes, aftershaves, and scented lotions
- Avoid eating foods with potent odours or fragrances while on campus

What if I don't adopt scent and odour-free practices?

If you choose not to adopt these practices, you risk causing your colleagues and students discomfort, pain, and even possible harm. When those who are adversely affected by scents and odours need to be absent from the College due to their allergies or sensitivities, they may become less productive and/or miss out on learning opportunities. It's important to work together as a community to promote a scent and odour-free campus.

Does adopting scent and odour-free practices intrude on my right to wear what I want?

Our goal is not to target individuals or criticize personal preferences; rather, it's important to be aware that scent and odour allergies and sensitivities exist at Langara. We can take precautions and prevent harm to colleagues and students whose health and well-being might be at risk.

Why should I adhere to this guideline if there isn't anyone in my classroom or workspace who suffers from a scent or odour allergy or sensitivity?

It's possible that a colleague or student may be suffering from an allergy or sensitivity, but feels uncomfortable disclosing it because he/she doesn't want to offend anyone. You may also come into contact with someone while in hallways, at the Library, or in the cafeteria. By placing the onus solely on those with allergies and sensitivities, we increase the risk of causing illness for these colleagues and students.

I'm someone who suffers from a scent or odour allergy or sensitivity. What's the best way to communicate this to my colleague and/or student(s)?

- Announce and explain your allergy/sensitivity to your colleagues and students
- Post information on your office door or in your workspace
- Include information about your allergy/sensitivity in course outlines (e.g. "Please do not wear scented products to my class or during my office hours. Thank you.")
- Remind your students or colleagues if exposure to scents and odours continues throughout the term
- Ask your manager to host scent and odour-free team meetings

I've communicated my environmental allergy or sensitivity many times, but my immune system continues to be compromised by a colleague or student's use of scented products. What can I do?

People often do not realize that their scents or odours are affecting the health of others, but once they become aware, people are usually supportive and eager to help. If the environmental trigger can be avoided, don't be afraid to speak up and have informal one-on-one conversations with your colleagues or students. The first step is to politely approach and educate them about the impact that scents and odours have on your overall well-being.

In the spirit of maintaining a collegial environment, we hope that everyone adopts an informal, cooperative, and respectful approach. However, if you find that a colleague or student is repeatedly ignoring your requests, you have the right to seek assistance through Human Resources or Student Services. Please note that accommodations will only be made for those who have environmental allergies and sensitivities and whose health is at risk; we are unable to accommodate for personal preferences.

I've been approached about the scented product I'm wearing/using. What should I do?

You may be puzzled or annoyed or feel hurt, defensive, or even insulted if someone tells you that the scented products you use or wear are a problem and asks you to avoid using them. Try to understand that it is not about you as a person or about your choice of fragrance: it's about the chemicals in the scented product.

Start by having an open discussion about the issue. Ask questions about the health impact on the person, including the types of symptoms they experience and the factors that exacerbate the symptoms (e.g. specific type of fragrance or amount applied). Have empathy and work together to find a resolution that satisfies both of you.

If we ask people to adopt scent and odour-free practices, they may stop using personal hygiene products altogether. Poor hygiene and strong body odour might result from their efforts to follow the guidelines. Would this not cause a new scent and odour issue?

We're not encouraging everyone to stop using hygiene products; we are only asking that the products used are neutral in their scent or fragrance. There are many products that effectively maintain personal hygiene while also reducing potential reactions in environmentally sensitive colleagues and students. The general rule of thumb is to avoid wearing scents or fragrances that can be detected more than an arm's length away from you, and to avoid applying scented products in public spaces.

What are "fragrance-free," "scent-free," and "unscented" products, and where can I purchase them?

These labels indicate that the products don't have the same quality of scent found in scented/fragranced products of the same brand. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that products labeled with these words will not trigger a reaction in someone who has environmental sensitivities. However, choosing these products will still be more effective in adopting a scent and odour-free environment than sticking to traditional scented products.

Going scent-free is not as difficult as you may think. Though these products may cost a bit more up front, they are often higher in quality and therefore longer lasting than their scented/fragranced counterparts. Many natural brands are available through your favourite health food store. Additionally, many big name hygiene brands are now adopting scent-free products of their own and making them available at pharmacies and supermarkets.

Do any other educational institutions or similar organizations adopt a scent and odour-free environment?

- University of British Columbia (UBC)
- Simon Fraser University (SFU)
- Douglas College
- Kwantlen Polytechnic University
- Vancouver Coastal Health Authority
- Fraser Health Authority
- Provincial Health Services Authority

Where can I get more information?

Visit the following websites for resources on how you can help to promote a scent and odour-free community at Langara.

- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#)
- [Canadian Lung Association](#)
- [WorkSafeBC](#)