

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 21, 2020

Media Contact

Alexandra Hayes

Director, Communications

484-888-4412 | ahayes@consumered.org

HCPA Responds to CMAJ Study that Claims Cleaning Products Cause Asthma and Wheeze in Children

WASHINGTON, DC – The Household & Commercial Products Association (HCPA) released the following statement today, attributed to Dr. Steve Bennett, Senior Vice President of Scientific & Regulatory Affairs at HCPA, after the Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ) published a study that claims frequent use of household cleaning products during early life is associated with an increased risk for childhood asthma and wheeze.

“Cleaning products are essential for protecting families from the spread of disease and maintaining a healthy home. These products are rigorously tested by manufacturers for safety and efficacy, and are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) or state agencies.

The results of the CMAJ study show an association between frequent use of household cleaning products during early life and an increased risk for childhood asthma and wheeze. While surveys can help identify potential areas of concern or opportunities for further research, the authors of the study note, ‘Our results do not prove causation.’

The sample population is not representative of the general population, and there is no information presented about the proximity of the children relative to the parents’ cleaning activities.

The authors of the study note that, ‘...the [Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development] cohort had a higher average household income, parental education level, and proportion of parental asthma and allergy than the general Canadian population, potentially limiting the generalizability of our results.’

The authors also ‘...assumed that each child was exposed to the products being used for cleaning, although we do not have data on the child’s location during the cleaning, whether the cleaned areas were rinsed or ventilated afterward, and other factors that would influence persistent exposure.’

These are significant limitations to the applicability of the results of the study. The location of the children during cleaning is an especially critical question that is not addressed in the report. Accurately interpreting the results of the study relies on knowing if the children were with the parents, in a different room, or out of the home completely during the cleaning activity.

Additionally, the researchers weighted all cleaning products equally in their scoring. They admit this ‘does not account for the differing potency of ingredients found in different products that may have more potent oxidizing properties.’

This, again, limits the applicability of the research because different cleaning products have dramatically different frequency of use patterns and safety considerations, for which product manufacturers provide specific instructions about the use and handling of these products to ensure their safety and effectiveness. For example, hand dishwashing detergent may be used daily, but toilet bowl cleaner is used less frequently and requires additional safety considerations. Therefore, it's unreasonable to equate these two products.

The EPA and the states carefully regulate the VOC content of consumer products, including cleaning products, to help improve air quality, and companies have invested significant resources to develop products that minimize VOC content while still ensuring the products perform safely and effectively.

Further, in 2017, California mandated that the ingredients in cleaning products be clearly communicated to consumers, and passed the Cleaning Product Right to Know Act. As a result, manufacturers of cleaning products are now required to disclose ingredients online and will be required to do so on label by January 1, 2021. HCPA worked with more than 100 environmental and public health groups and lawmakers from both sides of the aisle to achieve this landmark law.

Consumers who are especially concerned about the ingredients in their cleaning products can look for third-party certifications, such as EPA Safer Choice, Green Seal and UL ECOLOGO, which affirm that ingredients are safe and meet certain health and environmental criteria.

Ultimately, consumers can be confident that, when used according to the directions on the label, cleaning products are safe and effective, and comply with all applicable regulations and standards.”

###

About HCPA

The Household & Commercial Products Association (HCPA) is the premier trade association representing companies that manufacture and sell \$180 billion annually of familiar and trusted products used for cleaning, protecting, maintaining, and disinfecting homes and commercial environments. HCPA member companies employ 200,000 people in the U.S. whose work helps consumers and workers to create cleaner, healthier and more productive lives.