

Cleaning jobs linked to asthma risk

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Interesting new study from Imperial College London, Cleaning jobs linked to asthma risk

A new study has found strong evidence for a link between cleaning jobs and risk of developing asthma.

Researchers at Imperial College London tracked the occurrence of asthma in a group of 9,488 people born in Britain in 1958. Not including those who had asthma as children, nine per cent developed asthma by age 42. Risks in the workplace were responsible for one in six cases of adult onset asthma – even more than the one in nine cases attributed to smoking, according to the analysis.

There are many occupations that are thought to cause asthma. In this study, 18 occupations were clearly linked with asthma risk, four of which were cleaning jobs and a further three of which were likely to involve exposure to cleaning products.

Occupational asthma is widely under-recognised by employers, employees and healthcare professionals.

– Dr Rebecca Ghosh, MRC-HPA Centre for Environment and Health

Farmers, hairdressers, and printing workers were also found to have increased risk, as previous studies have reported. Farmers were approximately four times more likely to develop asthma as an adult than office workers.

Besides cleaning products, flour, enzymes, metals, and textiles were among materials in the workplace identified in the study as being linked to asthma risk.

The study was led by Dr Rebecca Ghosh at the National Heart and Lung Institute at Imperial College London. Dr Ghosh said: “This study identified 18 occupations that are clearly linked with asthma risk, but there are others that did not show up in our analysis, mainly because they are relatively uncommon. Occupational asthma is widely under-recognised by employers, employees and healthcare professionals. Raising awareness that this is an almost entirely preventable disease would be a major step in reducing its incidence.”

The study, published in the journal *Thorax*, was funded by Asthma UK and the Colt Foundation. Malayka Rahman, Research Analysis and Communications Officer at Asthma UK, said: “This research has highlighted a new group of people, specifically those working in occupations related to cleaning, such as cleaners or home-based personal care workers, who may have developed adult onset asthma due to exposure to chemicals they work with on a daily basis. We advise anyone who works in the industries highlighted in this study and who have experienced breathing problems to discuss this with their GP, and we urge healthcare professionals to make sure they consider possible occupational causes in adult onset asthma and tailor their advice to people with asthma accordingly.”

Around 5.4 million people in the UK have asthma, some of whom suffer as children and some of whom develop the disease in later life.

REFERENCE

R.E. Ghosh et al. ‘Asthma and occupation in the 1958 birth cohort.’ *Thorax*, 22 January 2013.
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