

How the Covid-19 pandemic affects people with environmental illness



The Covid-19 pandemic has special impacts on people with chemical and electrical sensitivities – some positive, some negative.

Keywords: chemical sensitivity, MCS, electrical sensitivity, environmental illness, COVID-19, COVID

Health care

The COVID virus tends to be most deadly to people with existing health conditions. Many people with MCS have asthma, a compromised immune system and irritated lungs, so they are probably in greater danger of getting seriously sick if infected, though we have no data on this.

Checking into a hospital is perilous under normal circumstances, since they use many toxic chemicals and much wireless electronics. The staff has rarely received training in how to handle patients with environmental illness and some may be dismissive or even hostile towards their patients.

During a pandemic the staff will be extra busy and even less likely to listen to and try to accommodate patients with this disability.

Breathing in chemicals that cause irritation of the airways is not a good idea when the COVID virus targets the lungs.

Fortunately, people with environmental illness are less likely to get infected, since they have to avoid other people anyway to be safe from their chemicals and electronic gadgets. They do social distancing anyway.

This writer knows of only one person with EI who verifiably was infected: a middle-aged man in Arizona who decided to ride it out at home, even though he was severely ill for several weeks and took months to recover.

Social Distancing

Social distancing is second nature to most people with environmental illness. When regular people started keeping their distance, that made it easier to avoid being hurt by their fragrances, laundry chemicals and portable electronics.

That wearing a mask suddenly became socially acceptable was another boon for those who had to wear one to deal with the fumes in stores. Suddenly nobody stared any more. The stigma went away. The more timid MCS-sufferers now dared use masks to protect them against the fumes.

Sanitizers

Hand sanitizers were used everywhere, with their toxic chemicals and fragrances. Goods bought in stores and online sometimes became contaminated by the personnel's hands.

Some stores had staff wash the handles of their shopping carts with the stuff, which then got on the hands and were hard to wash off – especially when trying not to use the restroom.



Shopping cart with aluminum foil wrapped around the handles to protect against sanitizers.

Some people wrapped the handles of their shopping cart with aluminum foil to avoid getting the chemicals on their hands.

Curbside Service

Some stores started to offer curbside pickup of orders, so people didn't have to go inside. This was great for people with MCS – though those with electrical sensitivities were often excluded as most services required a mobile phone.



Curbside pickup at a Walmart. The order is placed ahead of time using a smart-phone app, then at a scheduled time slot the staff brings the goods out to the car.

Working from Home

The pandemic made working from home normal, and will hopefully continue to make it acceptable in the future.

Working from home can greatly benefit workers with MCS, who no longer have to endure the colleagues' perfumes, the toxic restroom and the overall poor indoor air quality of many workspaces.

It should also cut down on harassment against some of those brave enough to speak up about their need for better air in the office.

For those who already had to work from home because of their MCS, it levelled the playing field when everybody started doing it. It became easier to participate in meetings when everybody used the same video system, instead of before where the person with MCS was the lone voice on a speakerphone struggling to keep up with what happened in the meeting room.

Social Isolation

The COVID pandemic forced many people to endure social isolation to control the spread of the virus.

The media discussed at great length how people coped, from people singing from their individual balconies to outdoor church services with people sitting in their cars, to video chats on their computers.

Psychologists and psychiatrists published papers warning about the depressions and other mental health effects of forced isolation.

Perhaps this shared experience will help people better understand the social isolation imposed on people with environmental illness, and why so many become depressed or anxious – instead of using it to blame the victim and prop up attempts to de-legitimize the disease.

Brain Fog goes mainstream

Brain fog is no longer a slang word just used in the MCS community. Mainstream media have used it as one of the symptoms experienced by people who do not fully recover from COVID, along with neuropathy, fatigue, anxiety, gastrointestinal problems, and many other symptoms.

Two such articles are: *When COVID Doesn't Go Away* (*Time*, August 31, 2020) and *Lingering Fog* (*The Economist*, August 22, 2020).

The above *Time* magazine article also reports that some people with this “post-COVID syndrome” are not believed by their doctors and dismissed by Social Security. It’s the same story as people with MCS, EHS, CFS, etc. are subjected to.

More Information

For other articles about environmental illnesses, go to www.eiwellspring.org.

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