

Using bleach can cause fatal lung problems

5/20



[Sky News](#)

4 hrs ago



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Cleaning products such as bleach have been linked to serious lung conditions including bronchitis and emphysema.

Using disinfectants just once a week could increase someone's chance of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), according to scientists from Harvard University and the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm).

While cleaning products have previously been linked with asthma, this is believed to be the first time they have been connected to COPD - an umbrella term for conditions characterised by increasing breathlessness.

COPD affects an estimated 1.2 million people in the UK. Almost 30,000 people die from it each year.

Scientists studied data from more than 55,000 female registered nurses in America, enrolled in the US Nurses' Health Study II, which began in 1989.



© Getty Cleaning products Researchers focused on nurses who were still working in healthcare in 2009, and had no history of COPD, following them until May this year.

During that period, 663 nurses were diagnosed with COPD.

Exposure to disinfectants including bleach, hydrogen peroxide and alcohol was assessed.

Each was associated with a raised risk of COPD of between 24 and 32%.

"To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to report a link between disinfectants and COPD among healthcare workers, and to investigate specific chemicals that may underlie this association," Dr Orianne Dumas, a researcher at Inserm, said.

"We need to investigate the impact on COPD of lifetime occupational exposure to chemicals and clarify the role of each specific disinfectant.

"Two recent studies in European populations showed that working as a cleaner was associated with a higher risk of COPD."

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Dr Dumas will present the study's findings at the European Respiratory Society International Congress in Milan on Monday.