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INDYPULSE

Regular bleach use linked to increased risk of fatal lung disease, says study

Regular use of disinfectant cleaning products has been linked to an increased risk of developing fatal lung conditions / Kin Cheung/Reuters

Using products once a week found to potentially increase a person's chance of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) by nearly a third

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The regular use of disinfectant cleaning products such as bleach has been linked to an increased risk of developing fatal lung conditions, researchers said.

A study by Harvard University and the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm) found that using the products just once a week could increase a person's chance of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) by nearly a third.

The research involved data from more than 55,000 nurses in the US, and scientists looked at exposure to specific disinfectants, including bleach, hydrogen peroxide, alcohol and chemicals known as quaternary ammonium compounds (quats), which are often used to disinfect surfaces such as floors and furniture.

All of these were associated with an increased risk of COPD of between 24 per cent to 32 per cent in the study.

COPD is an umbrella term for a series of conditions affecting the lungs including emphysema, chronic bronchitis and chronic asthma.

The condition affects an estimated 1.2 million people in the UK, with nearly 30,000 people dying from the disease each year.

Previous studies have linked exposure to disinfectants with breathing problems such as asthma, but it is believed this is the first piece of research to identify a link between disinfectants and COPD.

Dr Orianne Dumas, a researcher at Inserm, said: "The potential adverse effects of exposure to disinfectants on COPD have received much less attention, although two recent studies in European populations showed that working as a cleaner was associated with a higher risk of COPD.

"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."

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