

Cosmetics Allergies and Air Purifiers

A cosmetics allergy is when some sort of makeup or skin care product causes an allergic reaction, either by contact or by inhalation. The reaction to a cosmetics allergy can range from a minor sniffle to a serious rash and immune response. Cosmetics can be in the form of creams, powders, liquids, soaps, shampoos, perfumes, conditioners, deodorants, etc.....really anything that is put on one's person.

Contact Dermatitis

Contact dermatitis happens when a person is sensitive to a chemical in the cosmetic. Contact dermatitis can result in a rash on the part of the body covered by the cosmetic or on the part of the body used to apply the cosmetic. One can either be allergic to the substance or irritated by the substance. An irritant actually damages the skin, which an allergy evokes an immune response against some chemical in the cosmetic.

What Cosmetics Are to Blame and Why?

Interestingly, cosmetics can also become airborne. Powdered makeup or baby powder can both be airborne when used. Powder turns into particulate matter and can spread from room to room. If a family member is sensitive to the chemicals in the powder or is sensitive to the powder itself, they will have a reaction when the powder contacts their skin or when they inhale the powder. Mucous membranes are extremely sensitive and will likely be the first place where a reaction is felt. For example, sensitive individuals may experience teary eyes, runny noses or scratchy throats.

Individuals can also be sensitive or allergic to odors or fumes from cosmetics. Almost all cosmetics are scented in some way. Scents exist because of volatile organics included in the ingredients of cosmetics. Sometimes the scents are strong (e.g. shampoos, conditioners, creams) and sometimes they are very subtle (e.g. foundation, eye shadow, hand moisturizers). Sometimes the scents are an integral part of the cosmetic (e.g. perfumes). We live in a world that is inundated with scents and chemicals that are not found in nature.

Can Air Purifiers Help?

The short answer is Yes! An air purifier, if you have the correct type, can eliminate most of the danger for sensitive individuals. Remember that an air purifier can only eliminate the problem indoors, in the room in which the air purifier resides. But at least sensitive individuals can have a safe haven from a society that places great value in scents.

What Type of Air Purifier Is the Right Type for a Cosmetics Sensitivity?

This depends on the type of sensitivity or allergy from which the individual is suffering. If the problem is contact dermatitis, the problem is likely the airborne particulate matter from powders or sprays. If this is the case, the proper air purifier should have two different filters: a carbon-filter and a HEPA filter. A carbon-filter will chemicals, odors, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). HEPA filters are very good at capturing very small micron to sub-micron sized particles.

If the problem is sensitivity to odors and fumes, the proper air purifier will be one that contains some sort of adsorbent material such as zeolite or activated carbon. These substances will adsorb gases and chemicals from the air. The more adsorbent material the air purifier has the more substances it can adsorb (and the longer it will last).

Whatever type of air purifier you decide to purchase, make sure the capacity of the purifier matches the size of the room in which it resides. The purifier should be able to cycle the room air at least 4-5 times an hour. All filters must be monitored and changed periodically to maximize the efficiency of the air purifier.