

Essential Oils

Guidance for Healthy Classrooms



Are Essential Oils Beneficial?

Many people use essential oils as aromatherapy with the intent to treat various health conditions like pain, anxiety, asthma, and ADHD. However, systematic reviews of essential oils research have not found enough evidence to suggest they successfully treat any health issue (8).

Are Essential Oils Safe to Use?

Essential oils can adversely affect the health and safety of students and staff in the classroom and can be dangerous. They contain compounds that can aggravate asthma in students; they emit hazardous volatile organic compounds such as acetaldehyde, limonene, toluene, pinene, and camphene, all of which worsen asthma (9; 10; 1; 6; 3). They can cause respiratory irritation, headaches, and throat, eye, and nose irritation. Inhaling certain essential oils can cause pneumonia (6; 3).



Keeping essential oils in the classroom can be dangerous. When swallowed, eucalyptus, sage, and camphor oil can cause seizures, and lavandin oil can cause a coma (12). Additionally, lavender oil and tea tree oil were shown to cause abnormal or premature breast development in girls and boys when applied to the skin or inhaled (5; 11).

How to Avoid Allergies

Essential oils can cause allergic reactions when applied to the skin. This table adapted from (2), contains examples of essential oils that have caused allergic contact dermatitis (allergy). All essential oils should be avoided for a healthy classroom environment.

Angelica	Cassia	Elemi	Juniper berry	Neem	Rosemary	Tangerine
Aniseed	Cedarwood	Eucalyptus	Laurel leaf	Neroli	Rose	Tea tree
Bay	Chamomile	Frankincense	Lavandin	Niaouli	Rosewood	Thuja
Bergamot	Cinnamon	Galbanum resin	Lavender	Nutmeg	Sage	Thyme
Black cumin	Citronella	Geranium	Lemongrass	Orange	Sandalwood	Turpentine
Black pepper	Clary sage	Ginger	Lemon	Palmarosa	Silver fir	Valerian
Cajeput	Clove	Grapefruit	Litsea cubeba	Patchouli	Spearmint	Vetiver
Calamus	Coriander fruit	Guaiacwood	Lovage	Peppermint	Spike lavender	Ylang ylang
Cananga	Costus root	Hinoki	Mandarin	Petitgrain bigarade	Star anise	Zdravetz
Cardamom	Cypress	Hyssop	Melissa	Pine needle	Sweet basil	
Carrot seed	Dwarf pine	Jasmine absolute	Myrrh	Ravensara	Sweet marjoram	

Recommendations

Avoid using all essential oils and other fragranced products in the classroom. Use fresh air and good ventilation to reduce exposure to respiratory pathogens, chemicals, and odors. Increased fresh air supply and air filtration have been shown to improve health and test scores. Open windows for additional air or use fans pointed out of windows and doors to improve ventilation, being careful not to circulate across students.

Some schools, school districts, or early learning programs have established policies or procedures that may prohibit essential oils. School districts and private schools should adopt a policy or procedure prohibiting staff from bringing in and using any chemicals that are not preapproved or provided by the school or district. Always consult with your school, program, or school district to ensure compliance with their policies and procedures.

References

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