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## *Air Quality in Your Home*

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In the last several years, research has shown that indoor air can be more polluted than the outdoor air. This could be a potential problem since people spend around 90% of their time indoors. Thus the risk to health may be greater because of polluted air indoors. The following information provides answers to frequent questions about indoor air quality and its effects.

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- **How do I know if myself, or someone in my family has asthma?**

Only a medical doctor can diagnose someone with asthma. Common symptoms of asthma are wheezing, coughing, tightness in the chest, and trouble breathing. If you or someone in your family experiences any of these symptoms you may need to see your doctor.

- **Could something in my child's school or day care be making their asthma worse?**

Your child may be in a classroom with things such as pets, dust, or strong odors that can trigger their asthma. Know what your child's asthma triggers are and be sure that your child has an "asthma action card" on file at the school or day care. This card should provide all of your child's asthma and allergy-related information.



- **Is allowing cigarette smoking in my home really that harmful?**

Smoking in the home, even occasionally can cause major problems, especially with children. Secondhand smoke contains over 40 toxic substances that can cause cancer. Children that are exposed to the secondhand smoke are more likely to have asthma attacks and show more severe symptoms. These children also show higher cases of sinus and ear infections and breathing problems. Choose not to smoke inside and do not allow others to smoke inside your home.

- **Is it true that having furred and feathered pets in the home effects indoor air quality?**

Although we all love our pets, their dander, urine, and saliva can cause allergic reactions in some people. They can also serve as an asthma trigger and cause sinus and breathing problems. If pets are known to trigger allergies or asthma, keeping pets outside of the home is strongly recommended. If this is not possible, try to keep pets off of furniture and out of the allergic person's bedroom.

- **Is carpeting a problem for indoor air?**



Carpeting traps dust, pet dander, and other allergens. It is also difficult to dry carpet and padding out once it has been wet. If carpet is allowed to stay wet for more than 1 to 2 days, mold growth in your carpet could occur. Vacuum and clean carpet regularly so that dust, pet dander, and other allergens are not allowed to build-up. It is recommended that area rugs and hard flooring be used in rooms such as basements, bathrooms, and kitchens where moisture is most common.

- **How can I reduce dust in my home?**

Dust can be composed of dander, dead skin cells, dirt, plant pollen, and a number of other allergens. The best way for you to control dust is to dust with a damp cloth or static duster frequently and keep any excessive clutter in the home to a minimum.

- **Do mice and cockroaches have anything to do with the air quality in my home?**

Many people are allergic to droppings and other contaminants of roaches and rodents. Some pest waste and remains are small enough to be inhaled and spread disease. The inhalation of pest waste and remains can cause an asthma attack or make an existing attack worse. An important key to pest management is to clean up all food crumbs and liquid spills, keep trash emptied, and reduce the amount of clutter in the home. Also use baits and traps instead of sprays to control pests.



- **What is the proper way to store my household cleaning chemicals?**

Although we may not realize it, fumes from the household chemicals we use may cause problems. Household chemicals should be stored in a container with tight fitting lid. It is also a good idea to open windows and doors when using strong smelling chemicals in the home. Avoid using these products when people with asthma are present.

- **What are the harmful effects, if any, of burning candles and using plug-ins and air fresheners in my home?**

Burning candles, air fresheners, and plug-ins all contain either small particles or harmful gases that can be breathed in. Having these in the home is one of the most commonly overlooked asthma triggers. If these items are suspected of being asthma triggers or causing allergies, eliminate them from the home. If there are offending odors present in the home, try to eliminate the source of the odor instead of covering it up.

- **Should I keep a humidifier in my home?**

Only use a humidifier if your doctor has recommended that you to do so. Humidifiers add moisture into the air and moisture is one of the required conditions for mold growth. The EPA recommends that the humidity in your home be below 50% to prevent mold growth. So the constant running of a humidifier could push the moisture level in your home over the limit. Humidifiers should be cleaned on a regular basis, so follow the manufacturer's directions about cleaning and maintenance.

- **Is it beneficial to run my heating and air conditioning unit?**

Actually, yes it is. Your air conditioning unit pulls moisture out of the air helping to regulate the humidity levels in your home. The air conditioning unit also keeps the air circulating, which helps condition more of the air.

- **How often should I change the filters on my heating and air conditioning unit?**

Your air filters should be changed every 1-2 months. It is acceptable to have a moderate amount of dust and debris on the filter, but it should not be so thick that air is unable to pass through it. Reasonably priced filters are available for central air systems that do a better job at removing allergens from the air. Check for these type of filters wherever you purchase filters.

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**Additional Resources:**

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency - [www.epa.gov/iaq/index.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/index.html). Visit this web site for more information about indoor air quality at home, school, and child care.
- Visit the Metropolitan Public Health Department of Nashville & Davidson County website at <http://healthweb.nashville.gov/>

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For additional materials or information, please contact the Metro Health Department Pollution Control Division at (615) 340-5653