



American Lung Association® of the Upper Midwest Health House®

asthma: tips on eliminating common triggers in the home

asthma. Asthma is the third leading cause of hospitalization among children under the age of 15 and it is the leading cause of chronic illness among children.

Asthma is a disease of the respiratory system: the lungs and the system of air tubes that lead to the lungs. It is a chronic inflammatory condition that causes the tiny air passages in your lungs (*bronchioles*) to become narrowed when they react to something in the environment (*triggers*). Many substances that cause allergic reactions in children and adults (*allergens*) can also trigger asthma episodes. Other asthma triggers include airborne substances that irritate the lungs and airways, such as tobacco smoke, as well as stress and cold weather.

Here are some of the most common asthma triggers found indoors, with tips on how to reduce or eliminate them from your home:

- **Tobacco smoke:** Do not smoke inside your home, or allow others to do so. Even the smell of tobacco on clothing can trigger an asthma episode. Secondhand smoke can cause serious harm to children. An estimated 200,000 to one million asthmatic children have their condition worsened by exposure to secondhand smoke.

- **Animal dander:** All breeds of cats and dogs, regardless of hair length, shed dander that can trigger allergies and asthma. Keeping pets with fur or feathers out of the house is the best step. The next best step is keeping them out of bedrooms. Washing the pet weekly can help, if you are committed to keeping a cat or dog.
- **Paint fumes and other odors:** Selecting paint and other finishes with reduced or no volatile organic compounds (*VOCs*) can lower the amount of chemical emissions introduced into your home. Strong odors from perfumes, room deodorizers, cleaning chemicals and talcum powder can also be triggers.
- **Dust mites:** Keep the relative humidity levels in your home at 50% or below to inhibit the growth of dust mites. Wash bed linens, clothes, and stuffed toys weekly in hot (*130-140° F*) water. Use pillow and mattress covers. Vacuum when a person with asthma is not home.
- **Cockroaches:** Cover all food in kitchens. Limit the spread of food around the house. Keep food out of bedrooms. "Extermination" of cockroaches does not solve the problem if how they are getting in is not resolved as well.

- **Molds:** Mold cannot grow without moisture. Find the moisture source the mold is using to grow, such as a leaky roof, pipe, or window, and fix it. Carefully clean or remove materials with mold. Houseplants can also be a source of mold.
- **Pollens:** Have your child stay indoors when the pollen count is high. Use air conditioning, if possible. Keep windows closed during seasons of high pollen counts.

Asthma can be very serious and even life threatening if not properly managed. However, with proper management, people with asthma can lead normal, active lives. Good asthma management includes an asthma care plan with a health care provider, avoidance of triggers, proper use of medications and awareness of asthma symptoms. In the case of a serious asthma episode, emergency care may be required.

For further information:

- American Lung Association®: www.LungUSA.org, www.asthmabusters.org, www.asthmacamps.org
- American Lung Association® of the Upper Midwest Health House®: www.HealthHouse.org
- Asthma and Allergy Foundation: www.AAFA.org
- Allergy and Asthma Network/Mothers of Asthmatics: www.AANMA.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.CDC.gov/asthma
- Local Department of Health

These tips are brought to you by the American Lung Association® of the Upper Midwest Health House® program. For more information on creating a healthier home environment, visit our website at www.HealthHouse.org.



Raising the Standards for Healthier Indoor Environments.

490 Concordia Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55103.2441

Ph - 651.268.7614

Fx - 651.281.0242

Toll-free - 877.521.1491

www.HealthHouse.org

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