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HELP START A 4-H CLUB

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How Healthy is Your Home?

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October is National Home Indoor Air Quality Action and Awareness Month. Since most people spend the majority of their time inside now is a good time to become aware of the quality of air in your home. As we think about the importance of healthy indoor air, it is necessary for families to take a look around their home to see what products or items may be affecting their air quality. Let's go room to room and see how healthy each room might be. These ideas are offered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help us be aware of what we need to watch in our homes to keep us healthy.

Starting with the Kitchen

Household Cleaners

— Unhealthy or irritating vapors may be released from chemicals in products. **Remedy:** Select non-aerosol and non-toxic products. Use, apply, store and dispose according to manufacturer's directions. Never mix products together. If products are concentrated, properly label storage container with dilution instructions. Use up product completely.

Unvented Gas Stove & Range

— source of carbon monoxide and combustion by-products. **Remedy:** Keep appliance burners clean! Periodically have burners properly adjusted (blue flame tip, not yellow). Install and use exhaust fan. Never use a gas range/stove to heat your home.

Bathroom & Laundry

Moisture from Bathing, Clothes Washing, etc. — Encourages biological pollutants (mold, mildew, cockroaches, dust mites) which can trigger asthma. Also creates potentially damaging condensation. **Remedy:** Install and use exhaust fan. Fix plumbing leaks promptly.

Personal Care Products

— Organic gases are released from chemicals in products. **Remedy:** Select no/low odor-producing products. Select non-aerosol varieties. Open window or use exhaust fan. Follow manufacturer's directions for use and container disposal.

Unvented Clothes Dryer

— Produces excessive moisture and dust. Moisture encourages biological pollutants.

Living Area

Carpets — Biological pollutants can grow on water-damaged carpet; organic gases are released from new carpet. **Remedy:** Clean and dry or remove water-damaged carpets promptly. If installing new carpet, air it out before installation. Ask for low-emitting adhesives, if adhesives are needed. During installation open doors and windows; use window fans or room air conditioners. Vacuum regularly.

House Dust Mites — Biological allergens can trigger asthma. **Remedy:** Clean house and vacuum regularly. Wash bedding in hot water above 130° F.

Moisture — Encourages biological pollutants including allergens (mold, mildew, dust mites and cockroaches). **Remedy:** If possible, eliminate moisture



U.S. EPA - Office of Pollution Prevention & Toxics

source(s). Install and use exhaust fans. Use dehumidifier, if necessary. Remove molds and mildew on hard surface by cleaning first with a dish detergent solution and then with a solution of chlorine bleach (1 cup) and water (1 gallon).

Gas or Kerosene Space Heater

— Carbon monoxide and combustion pollutants. **Remedy:** Never use unvented kerosene or gas space heaters. In room where heater is located, provide fresh air by opening a door to the rest of the house, turning on an exhaust fan and opening a window slightly.

Lead-Based Paint

— Manufactured before 1978. **Remedy:** Leave lead-based paint undisturbed, if in good condition. Prior to removing paint, test for lead. Do-it-yourself lead test kits are often available from hardware or building supply stores. Do not sand, burn off, or remove lead paint yourself; hire a person with special training for correcting lead paint problems. For more information call 1-800-LEAD-FYI.

Animals

— Leave allergens such as dander, hair, feathers or skin in the air. **Remedy:** Keep pets outdoors, as often as possible. Clean entire house regularly; “deep” clean areas where pets are permitted.

Bedrooms

Humidifier/Vaporizer (cold mist type) — Can encourage biological allergens including mold, mildew and cockroaches which can trigger asthma and infectious disease agents (viruses, bacteria). **Remedy:** Use and clean according to manufacturer's directions. Refill with fresh water daily.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors

— Install a smoke detector in the hallway adjacent to or located in each bedroom. If you have gas or other fossil-fuel burning appliances in the house, install carbon monoxide detectors in these locations as well. Combination smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are available. (Remember to check the batteries frequently.)

Other Tips

Other tips to keep your home healthy and reduce places for pollutants to grow

include:

- Keep furniture away from walls to prevent moisture build up.
- Keep humidity less than 50 percent to reduce dust mites.
- Change furnace filters regularly.
- Test the home for radon.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector.
- Do not run vehicles in the garage as carbon monoxide may enter the home.
- Check the home for plumbing and other water leaks.
- Use exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathrooms.
- Clean and check humidifiers and dehumidifiers.
- Check and clean drip pans on refrigerators and freezers.
- Bath pets regularly to reduce animal dander.
- Vacuum carpets often.
- Check basements for dampness. Reduce moisture to control mold and mildew problems.

Breathing clean indoor air has an important impact on a persons health. The ordinary practices we do daily including cooking, heating, cooling and cleaning can cause the spread of pollutants in the home. Studies show indoor air can be more polluted than outdoor air. Taking steps to reduce the pollutants in the air will save money by reducing health problems and also maintenance of the home.

Local Resources

- University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension in Lancaster County; 441-7180, <http://lancaster.unl.edu>
- Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Department; 441-8040, <http://lancaster.ne.gov/City/Health>
- Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services; 471-3121, www.hhs.state.ne.us
 - Lead-Based Paint Hot Line: 1-888-242-1100 ext 1 (Nebraska only)
 - The Nebraska Radon Program 1-800-334-9491

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