

Your Healthy Home's Indoor Air Quality

No matter how much we all may enjoy the great outdoors, we all spend most of our time indoors. Our homes are our source of shelter, rest, comfort and security. But yet our homes are all too often our primary source of illness and injury.

Most people spend at least half their lives inside their homes. Indoor air can be more harmful to your family's health than outdoor air. Is the air in your home safe to breathe? It is not always easy to tell if you have poor air quality. You can smell paint fumes and see smoke, but you may not be able to see or smell other dangers, like radon gas. This section will help you ask the right questions to find out if the air inside your home is safe and healthy.

Asthma and allergies may be caused or made worse by things in the air you breathe. Pets, tobacco smoke, cockroaches, and damp basements can all pollute the air and make asthma worse.

Your family can be poisoned from toxic gases. Carbon monoxide is a deadly gas you can't smell or see. It comes from combustion appliances, like gas heaters, furnaces, stoves and dryers. When they are hooked up wrong or not maintained, carbon monoxide escapes and you can breathe it. Car exhaust also has carbon monoxide.

Radon is another gas that can get into some homes from the ground underneath it. Different parts of the country have different levels of radon. Radon, a radioactive gas, causes cancer.

Many products used to build and furnish your home can make indoor air unhealthy. Harmful chemicals can be in new carpets and in furniture made of particle board. These chemicals can cause headaches, burning eyes, sore throat, dizziness, or tiredness in some people. Old paint may have lead in it. Lead is a serious health risk for children. Hobbies and projects that involve sanding, painting, and welding may also make indoor air harmful. Some household products, especially solvents, can be dangerous. Mold and mildew grow in damp places - basements, bathrooms, kitchens, or anywhere that water is trapped. Some mold is toxic and some can make allergies or

asthma worse. Dust may contain chemicals, dust mites (microscopic pests), mold, lead, and other things that cause health problems. Smoke from wood stoves and fireplaces may contain harmful particles. Regular housekeeping can reduce dust and protect your family's health.

Today's homes are built tighter for increased energy efficiency and exchange air less frequently than many older homes do. Without proper maintenance and ventilation, our homes air can quickly become stagnant.

Ask yourself these questions –

1. Does anyone in your family have asthma or allergies?
2. Does a family member experience burning eyes, coughing or sneezing that happens most often while at home?
3. Do you over use cleaning and freshening products?
4. Does anyone smoke inside your home?
5. Do you have indoor pets?
6. Are your bathrooms ventilated? Exhaust vents or functioning windows?
7. Are your gas appliances maintained and serviced?
8. Have you ever tested your home for radon gas?

Now consider what actions may improve the indoor air quality in your home.