



Boston Health Notes

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How to Reduce Asthma Triggers in Your Home

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Did you know that, nationally, asthma is the most common reason that children miss school? In Boston children ages 5-14 are hospitalized at three times the rate as Massachusetts as a whole. Further, the Boston Youth Survey surveyed 2285 Boston teens, in 2000. One out of seven of these teens reported that they have active, doctor diagnosed asthma. By any measure, asthma is a major health concern for Boston residents.

Asthma is a chronic disease of the airways in the lungs -- a disease that can't be cured, but can be controlled. During an asthma episode, the airways become swollen and constricted, making it hard to breathe. Many people with asthma are prescribed medication to help manage their conditions, and to help clear their airways when they have an asthma attack. However, there are things people can do to help minimize those things in the environment which make asthma worse.

Controlling "asthma triggers" is an important part of controlling asthma. Many asthma triggers – like dust and dust mites, air pollution and tobacco smoke, mold and perfumes are found in our everyday environment. Even pests like cockroaches and mice can be asthma triggers.

Since we spend much of our time at home, that's a good place to reduce the triggers that make asthma worse. By making some small changes, you can reduce exposure to major asthma triggers such as environmental tobacco smoke, and cockroach and mice allergen in the home.

Environmental tobacco smoke or second hand smoke is exhaled by a smoker and breathed in by others and is related to a number of health problems in children, including asthma. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that second hand smoke causes

up to a million asthma episodes of asthma a year and is probably a cause of asthma among children who would not otherwise develop it. To decrease exposure to secondhand smoke, avoid smoking in your home or car and ask others not to smoke. Instead, smoke outside and away from children. Also, make sure your day care provider does not allow smoking inside or around children as well.

Of course the best way to reduce environmental tobacco smoke is for smokers to quit. For those who are ready to quit or cut back on smoking, there are many programs to help. In Massachusetts, **Tobacco-Free Helpline**, at 1-800-879-8678.

Controlling pests in your home is another important way to reduce a significant asthma trigger. **Integrated Pest Management** is a way to reduce pests, like cockroaches and rodents, while using less pesticides and poisons, which can be harmful to health. Pests need many of the same things as people to survive. They need a way in and out of your home, food and water, and a place to sleep and nest. Here are some simple things you can do to control a pest problem at home:

- Have all leaks repaired and all cracks and holes.
- Fill spaces around pipes.
- Keep trash in a covered container and take it out frequently.
- Trash containers outside should be covered as well.
- Dishes can be washed at night instead of in the morning.
- Remove pet food in between meals.
- Finally, pests like dark spaces, so try to have as little clutter as possible. Piles of newspapers and grocery bags are places to nest, so throw away what you are not using. Also, clean away their pest droppings with a wet rag – pests are attracted to their own odor.

The Boston public Health Commission can provide further information on how to reduce asthma triggers in your home through its **Asthma Prevention and Control Program** at **(617) 534-5966**.