




ASTHMA

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development • Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control



"The important thing to remember is that you can control your asthma."

Centers for Disease Control "Basic Facts About Asthma"

Did you know...?

- Over 20 million people in the United States suffer from asthma?¹
- Over 6.3 million children under 18 report having asthma?²
- There were 75% more cases of asthma in 1994 than in 1980?³
- Asthma is the third leading cause of hospitalization in the United States?⁴

What is it?

Asthma is a lung disease. It causes people to wheeze, cough, be short of breath, and sometimes even die. People with asthma can suffer from frequent periods of difficulty breathing called "asthma attacks." During an attack, the airways swell, the muscles around them tighten, and the airways produce thick yellow mucus.

Asthma is not contagious, but it does run in families, so if parents have asthma, their children are more likely to have it, too.

Children, particularly those living in urban areas and crowded or unclean conditions are especially at risk for developing asthma. "African-American children living in low-income families tend to have more severe asthma and are at greater risk of death."⁵

Each person is different, but many things (called asthma "triggers") can cause asthma attacks. These can be found both outdoors and indoors and include:

- Cold weather
- Pollen
- Exercise
- Stress
- Dust and dust mites
- Cockroaches
- Mold
- Pet dander (skin flakes)
- Rodents
- Tobacco smoke
- Air fresheners

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Mold is a common asthma trigger.



Photo by: January E. Jones, *Improving Kids' Environment*

What can you do?

Because there is no cure for asthma, **it is most important to work on preventing attacks.** There are three major categories of prevention:

Keep a clean home.

- Make sure that your home is free of dust, mold, smoke, and other potential triggers.
- Vacuum often—HEPA (High Efficiency Particle Air) filters remove dust best.
- Keep foods stored in tightly sealed containers to avoid attracting cockroaches and rodents by keeping food in tightly sealed containers.
- Clear crumbs, drips, spills, and dirty dishes immediately.
- Identify and quickly fix water leaks in your home.

Keep people with asthma away from dust, dust mites, and smoke.

- Use zippered “allergen resistant” mattress and pillow covers to keep dust mites out of sleeping spaces.
- Keep pets outdoors or away from sleeping areas; clear hairs from carpets and furniture.
- Quit smoking, or smoke only outside your home and car. Always keep tobacco smoke away from children.
- Change bed sheets often.
- Keep people with asthma out of a room while vacuuming or dusting.

Get medical advice and follow the doctor’s instructions.

- Get medical attention for breathing problems.
- Get emergency medical care for bad attacks of shortness of breath or wheezing.
- Take all prescribed medication, either to prevent attacks or to lessen the symptoms.
- Find out what allergies you have so you can avoid these potential asthma triggers.

For more information . . .

Visit HUD’s website at www.hud.gov/offices/lead for more information about addressing health hazards in homes or to learn if HUD has a Healthy Homes program in your community. From this website, you can download a copy of “Help Yourself to A Healthy Home” for more practical steps you can take to make your home a healthy home.

Other Federal Resources

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/od/oc/childhealth

US Environmental Protection Agency

www.epa.gov/children

Other Resources

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI)

www.aaaai.org

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

www.aafa.org

The Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics (AANMA)

www.aanma.org

Ask your doctor or contact your local or state department of health.

Cockroaches can trigger asthma. Use traps, gel bait, and cleaning to deal with roaches.



Photo by: January E. Jones, *Improving Kids' Environment*

¹“Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use, and Mortality, 2000-2001,” National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

²Ibid

³Centers for Disease Control. Surveillance for Asthma – United States, 1960-1995, MMWR. 1998; 47 (SS-1).

⁴Environmental Health Watch, website www.ehw.org/Asthma/ASTH_home1.htm. August 25, 2004

⁵Centers for Disease Control. Surveillance for Asthma – United States, 1980-1999, MMWR, 2002; 51 (SS-01).