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Posted February 16, 2009

Healthy Home

Is the Air in Your Home Healthy? - How to improve air quality and fight asthma in your home

OTTAWA - Asthma is one of the most common chronic conditions affecting Canadians today. An estimated 2.2 million Canadians suffer from asthma, and among children, the condition is growing at an alarming rate. While the exact cause is unknown, one of the most important steps in managing asthma is avoiding or controlling the "triggers" that can spark an attack. These triggers include allergens such as dust mites, animal dander, cockroaches, and mold. Other chemical contaminants in the home such as tobacco smoke and solvents, and poor indoor air quality can also aggravate asthma. It's important to keep moisture levels under control because both dust mites and molds love moisture. To determine if you have a moisture problem inside your house, you can get a small, inexpensive and easy-to-use instrument called a hygrometer to measure the relative humidity. During the winter season, relative humidity should be below 45 per cent. From spring to fall use a dehumidifier in your basement to reduce dampness and discourage mold. It is a good idea to try to keep the relative humidity in the basement at or below 50%.

Normal activities in your kitchen produce water vapour and odours, but installing an efficient range hood, vented to the exterior, can help minimize the effects on your air quality. As well, when you shower or bathe, use the bathroom fan and allow it to run for 15 minutes or longer.

To help control dust, vacuum thoroughly and often. A vacuum cleaner with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter or a central vacuum that exhausts to the outside can prevent the dust collected from being re-distributed back to the room. Area rugs are preferable where dust allergies or asthma are a concern since they can be removed for proper cleaning. Avoid wallpaper, textured finishes, fabric furnishings and draperies that can trap dust. If you are replacing floor coverings, ceramic flooring and hardwood are easily cleanable and reduce chemical odours. You can also reduce dust mites by vacuuming your mattresses, pre-soaking and washing bedding in warm water and using washable mattress and pillow covers.

You can reduce the level of chemical contaminants in your home by asking smokers to smoke outside. Avoid using pesticides, harsh chemical cleaners or scented household cleaners. Air fresheners and deodorizers only mask odours and add pollutants to the air. Lastly, use only new, low-odour paint. Lastly, choose an electric stove rather than a gas stove and be sure to change your furnace filters regularly. It's also wise to have your furnace serviced by a heating contractor and your air ducts cleaned once a year.

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