



## Center for Hygiene & Health in Home & Community Health Friendly Spring Cleaning!

It's that time of year again! The days are longer and sunnier, birds are chirping, and everything is blooming! Traditionally, this is the time of year when people take time to get rid of the clutter that has accumulated over the course of the winter.



Cleaning your home and office is an excellent way to prepare for spring, but doing so can also stir up allergens that make you sick. Most people are aware that outdoor air pollution can damage their health, but may not know that indoor air pollution can also have significant effects.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) indoor air quality is a critical factor in our health. Indoor pollution sources that release gases or particles into the air are the primary cause of indoor air quality problems in homes. Inadequate ventilation, high temperature and humidity levels can also increase concentrations of some pollutants. If too little outdoor air enters your home, pollutants can accumulate to levels that can pose health problems.

### Sources of Indoor Pollution

There are many sources of indoor air pollution in any home including:

- combustion sources such as oil, gas, kerosene, coal, wood, and tobacco products
- building materials and furnishings as diverse as deteriorated, asbestos-containing insulation, wet or damp carpet, and cabinetry or furniture made of certain pressed wood products
- products for household cleaning and maintenance, personal care, or hobbies
- central heating and cooling systems and humidification devices
- outdoor sources such as radon, pesticides, and outdoor air pollution

Indoor allergens accumulate more so during the winter months, but you can strengthen your defenses by doing a deep, thorough spring cleaning.



### Reducing Allergens in the Home

There are some simple steps you can take to reduce the amount of allergens lingering in your home:

- Clean the carpets & upholstery by hot water extraction to reduce the numbers of mold spores.
- Air out mattresses.
- Remove mold and mildew from kitchen surfaces, cleaning under the refrigerator, washing and disinfecting garbage cans, thoroughly scrubbing bathrooms, and cleaning or changing shower curtains
- Clean the yard frequently and remove any wet piles of leaves, grass, or mulch.
- Fix any dampness problems (i.e. leaky pipes and weak window seals).
- Remove piles of 'junk' which easily collect dust and mold spores.

- Launder/clean pillows.
- Keep you home well ventilated while cleaning - ventilation is an important factor in reducing stored up allergens. Open the windows, turn on the air conditioner, or use an indoor air purifier.
- Clean the blinds which trap a lot of dust and wash your drapes.
- Clean out stored, expired medicines.
- Complete an inventory of chemical products to make sure that they are properly labeled & securely stored.
- Keep chemicals to the essentials & follow our safety tips below to avoid toxicity.
- Check the batteries on smoke & CO2 detectors.

#### A Note About Old Medications

The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy advises disposing of expired medicines by throwing them in the trash with undesirable substances such as coffee grounds or kitty litter and putting the mix into containers so drugs will not be found and used by others inappropriately.

The FDA advises that some drugs can be flushed safely down the toilet. Some community groups sponsor "take-back" events

that allow people to bring unused drugs to collection centers, an approach the government also supports.



#### Use Chemicals Safely

Many of the chemicals used in and around the home are considered dangerous and may cause serious health consequences if not used properly (i.e. burn skin, cause rashes, and/or irritate eyes and lungs). Read warning labels and instructions for proper use. A chemical's potential risk to your health depends on how it's used, its concentration, and whether you are sensitive to its ingredients.

Follow these tips for safe use:

- Read product labels for proper use.
- Use chemicals cleaners only with proper ventilation. Don't stay in the room any longer than necessary after cleaning.
- Never mix cleaners. The combination can produce toxic gases that can cause coughing, loss of voice, burning, suffocation, and even death.

- Wear protective clothing and gloves when using chemicals. Many household chemicals are corrosive, meaning they can cause burns to the skin.
- Clean up accidental spills immediately.
- Store all household and garden chemicals properly in tightly closed childproof containers and well out of reach to prevent injury to pets or children. Never store chemicals in soda bottles, which the kids can mistake for a drink.
- Check labels for flammability.
- Keep directions for chemical use in a central place, as they list accidental poisoning treatments.
- Have the phone number for the poison control center in a handy place.

#### Resources

The government's facts sheet on medicine disposal is available online at: [http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/pdf/prescrip\\_disposal.pdf](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/pdf/prescrip_disposal.pdf).

The National Institutes of Health Household Products Database provides information about specific chemical products (<http://hpd.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/household/search>).