



CHICAGO ASTHMA
CONSORTIUM

Tenants with Asthma: An Environmental Checklist

The condition of your household or the building you live in can affect your health and poor conditions are a major public health issue. Substandard housing has been linked to numerous health problems including ASTHMA.

Chicago Asthma Consortium (CAC) and Metropolitan Tenants Organization (MTO) collaborated to create this checklist as a tool to identify and lessen potential household hazards (called triggers) for any tenant or family member with asthma.

It is based on MTO's Seven Principles of a Healthy Home and portions are made specific to asthma control.

It is meant to be used when looking for a new home or apartment and may be used to review with your potential or current landlord. "TIPS" are shared not as end-all solutions, but to point out actions you and your landlord can take to better manage your living conditions and reduce exposure to environment triggers that could otherwise worsen your asthma.



THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF A HEALTHY HOME:

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KEEP IT DRY

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KEEP IT CLEAN

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KEEP IT PEST-FREE

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KEEP IT VENTILATED

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KEEP IT SAFE

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KEEP IT
CONTAMINANT-FREE

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KEEP IT MAINTAINED

Tenants with Asthma: An Environmental Checklist

If you are a person with asthma, have a friend or family member with asthma, or are a healthcare provider, please visit The Chicago Asthma Consortium at www.chicagoasthma.org for a variety of support and information.

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THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF A HEALTHY HOME

1

KEEP IT DRY

MOLD can develop when moisture and dampness do not completely dry due to poor ventilation or standing water.

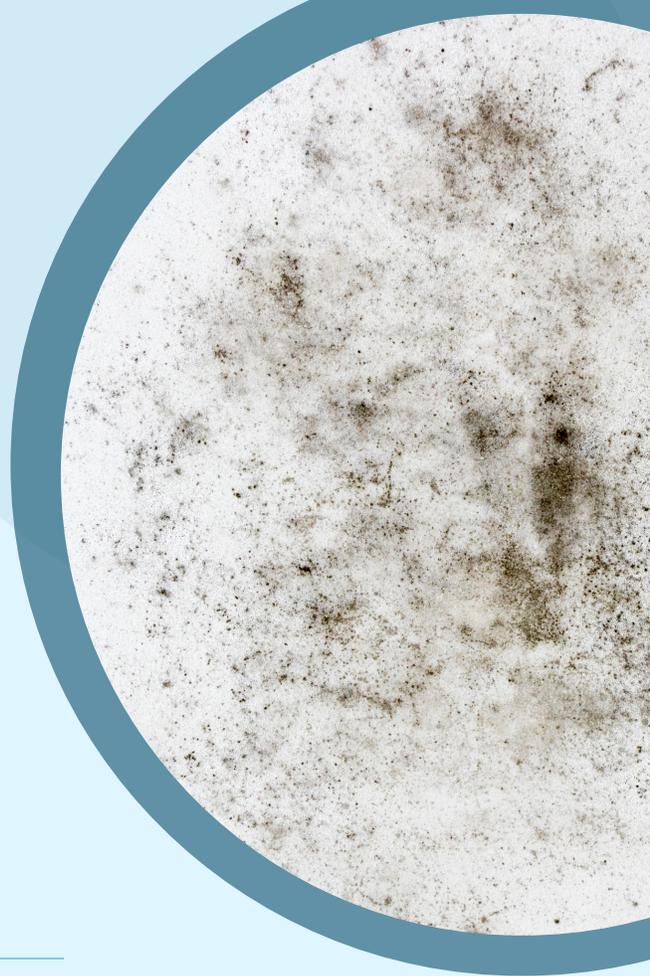
WHERE & WHAT TO CHECK FOR

Places:

- Windowsills
- Bathrooms surfaces: bathtub or shower surround, floor, walls and ceilings, especially near corners and edges, showerheads/faucets
- Bathroom or kitchen cabinets
- Leaky sinks: pipes or faucets
- In and around A/C units, refrigerators, washers/dryers and dishwashers shower curtains and doors
- Watermarks toward bottoms of walls and in closets

Characteristics (Variety):

- Pink, green, black, white, yellow, blue, brown, orange
- Fuzzy, dusty, or powdery looking
- Discolors and warps paint and any building materials like wallpaper, tile, drywall, and wood
- Can smell like musty, mildewy, and stale, damp air



1

KEEP IT DRY

TIPS

Before Moving In:

- Point it out to your potential landlord; ask that it be professionally removed preferably before you move in (PAINTING over it is NOT a solution!)
- Get everything agreed to in writing (Documented) that includes a deadline - usually 14 days - for what will be done
- If this condition will not be corrected safely - keep looking for your next home, if possible

Already a Tenant

- When you *first* notice MOLD in your home, you can try removing it safely and regularly using GREEN CLEANING METHODS AND PRODUCTS that are asthma friendly
 - Baking soda, white household vinegar, Bon Ami cleanser
 - Air it out to dry it out (open windows, use fans vented to the outside)

For what mold can look like and asthma friendly TIPS to remedy mold in your home, go to:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGESxUIPguQ> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f9YUA3vKl4>

- When you notice your efforts are not lasting, report it to your landlord
- Follow the same advice as 'Before Moving In': document everything when moving into and while occupying a unit. Anything agreed to by the landlord should be documented in writing and photos should be taken



2

KEEP IT CLEAN

HOUSEHOLD DUST contains many things. One major component of household dust is **DUST MITES**. Dust mites are microscopic insects that feed on your dried skin cells that flake off; they leave behind droppings that are found in household dust, carpeting, bedding, upholstered furniture and curtains.

THIRD-HAND SMOKE are the by-products of cigarettes, cooking oil, candles and incense. It can be more dangerous than what is burned and more irritating to the airways.

While cleaning helps reduce the exposure to household dust, dust mites and third-hand smoke, the products used to clean can irritate the airways. Typical cleaning products and chemicals like bleach, ammonia, and other industrial solutions are considered **IRRITANTS** and can move through the air, enter the lungs and/or settle in/on hard and soft surfaces.



WHERE & WHAT TO CHECK FOR

Places:

- Household dust is everywhere! Check hard and soft surfaces, including fan blades, bathroom exhaust fans, and bedding (mattresses / box springs, pillows, blankets, sheets, comforters)
- Carpets and rugs: They contain asthma irritants like dust, mold, pollen, chemical fragrances and 3rd-hand smoke
- Furnishings included in your rent (sofas, kitchen appliances, etc.) for dust, mold, and 3rd-hand smoke
- Vents are pathways for odors and chemicals traveling from room to room and apartment to apartment
- Furnace/Air-conditioning filters collect and hold dust, dust mites, and allergens from outdoors
- Know the type of cleaning and disinfectant products used to clean the home

2

KEEP IT CLEAN

TIPS

Before Moving In:

- Be your Own Best Advocate! Offer suggestions to your potential landlord or management to accommodate your health concerns, including:
 - Using or switching to effective, asthma-friendly cleaning and disinfecting products
 - Using commercial air fresheners sparingly
 - Switching to natural or alternative air fresheners like:
 - essential oil diffusers
 - boiled or simmering water to disperse the smell of cinnamon (ground or sticks), eucalyptus leaves or oil, or orange or lemon peels
 - Using a HEPA-filter vacuum
 - Removing carpets, replacing with hard surface flooring like hardwood or tiles
 - Regular schedule for shampooing carpets and rugs
 - Cleaning A/C unit or central air system and furnace filters monthly
 - Cleaning all ducts to your apartment annually; placing filters inside or over your supply vents

Already a Tenant

- Avoid the use of irritating cleaning products such as bleach or ammonia
- If YOU use industrial cleaning and disinfecting products, *follow all instructions from the label of the product*
- Do not mix products or create “stronger solutions on your own - can cause a more irritating and dangerous situation!”
- Use commercial air fresheners sparingly
 - Unplug electric fresheners at night
 - Switch to natural or alternative choices



2

KEEP IT CLEAN

TIPS *continued ...*

Already a Tenant *continued ...*

- Switch to green cleaning products that are effective and better for persons with asthma
 - White household vinegar mixed 1:1 with water for cleaning and disinfecting
 - Baking soda
 - Bon Ami cleanser (abrasive but has no chlorine)
 - Reusable cloth cleaning towel(s) instead of commercial wipes
 - Use a cloth moistened with plain water to remove dust
 - Use cleaning brushes that can get into crevices
 - If detergents or soaps are needed, use a mild fragrance-free version
- Daily to weekly vacuuming with a HEPA filter vacuum
- If possible, have landlord replace carpet with with hard surface flooring like hardwood or tiles
- Wash and dry rugs on a regular basis
- To reduce 3rd hand smoke:
 - Make sure the home is ventilated when cooking, burning candles or when using your fireplace
 - Keep smoke outside the home
- Store food in insect-proof containers such as glass jars or re-sealable plastic containers.
- Keep garbage and trash in containers with tight-fitting lids and use plastic liners when possible. Keep trash cans away from doorways. Special trash cans may be mounted on pedestals in public spaces like schools to keep them off the ground where cockroaches forage. Remove trash, newspapers, magazines, piles of paper bags, rags, boxes, and other items that provide hiding places and harborage.
- Eliminate plumbing leaks and other sources of moisture. Increase ventilation where condensation is a problem.
- Vacuum cracks and crevices to remove food and debris. Be sure surfaces where food or beverages have been spilled are cleaned up immediately. Vacuuming also removes cockroaches, shed skins, and egg cases, reducing overall cockroach numbers.



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THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF A HEALTHY HOME

3

KEEP IT PEST-FREE

MICE, COCKROACHES AND BEDBUGS leave behind feces, urine, and other chemicals that make asthma worse.

MICE AND COCKROACHES look for hidden and open places to feed, drink, and nest; they leave trails of poop and urine for others to follow.

BED BUGS are small insects that feed on human and animal blood; they get from place to place by hiding in folds and crevices of furniture, clothes, luggage, purse, bags, bedding, etc.



WHERE & WHAT TO CHECK FOR

- ENTRY POINTS for rodents and roaches
 - Holes, cracks or gaps in doors, walls, around electrical outlets and pipes
- Evidence of any pests, such as feces (black or brown spots, rice-size or smaller black ‘pellets’)
- Turn on all lights when performing this assessment; use a flashlight where not well-lit
- Look under all sinks
- Open and inspect all cabinets
- Check surfaces and corners of all spaces (including closets, cabinets and pantries), shelves and floors
- Look inside light fixtures like sconces and overhead chandeliers
- EXTERMINATION METHODS used:
 - CHEMICAL: Bombs and sprays
 - NON-CHEMICAL: Diatomaceous earth, vinegar, boric acid, high heat
- GARBAGE LOCATIONS AND CONDITIONS
 - Garbage containers should have intact and closing lids
- OUTSIDE VEGETATION
 - Overgrowth and ill-maintained bushes and grasses are ideal hiding and breeding places for rodents

3

KEEP IT PEST-FREE

TIPS

Before Moving In:

- Document any promises from your potential landlord/management to address any evidence found

Already a Tenant

- Keep record of all discussions with landlord: date, topic, resolutions
- Document in writing to landlord all issues with these pests
- Include 14 days to address any concerns
- Ask for extermination schedule
- If you recognize any pests in your unit or building, you **MUST** notify your landlord immediately
- Request use of asthma-friendly extermination methods that may include
 - Diatomaceous earth for roaches and bedbugs
 - Boric acid for roaches
 - Mouse traps
- Place mouse and roach bait traps in corners, flush against baseboards, or both. Be sure to use at least 10 traps in the kitchen and two in the bathroom, adding more traps for additional rooms where pest activity is spotted or suspected.
- If structural issues are identified like holes and cracks that have led to INFESTATION, contact MTO for guidance at their hotline, 773-292-4988, M-F 1-5pm.



4

KEEP IT VENTILATED

Increasing the fresh air supply in your home improves respiratory health. Ventilate bathrooms and kitchens and use whole house ventilation to supply fresh air and reduce the concentration of contaminants in the home.

WHERE & WHAT TO CHECK FOR

- Stove/oven vented to the outside
 - you can see the vent connection to the ceiling or wall; otherwise it's just a fan above the stove/oven
- Vents with filters
- Clean filters inside the A/C window unit
- Clean filter inside heater furnace
- All windows operating properly
- All ceiling fans are working properly
- Bathroom exhaust fan is working properly

TIPS

Before Moving In:

- Get in writing the schedule for cleaning or replacement for all filters
- If any window does not work properly, get a commitment to repair it in writing, with a specific repair-by date

Already a Tenant

- Ask for the addition of a filtering fan over stove/oven
 - Request regular cleaning or replacement schedule of heater/furnace filters 2-3 times per year



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THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF A HEALTHY HOME

Although not specific to ASTHMA, the remaining HEALTH HOMES PRINCIPLES are listed below for further guidance for any tenant:



5

KEEP IT SAFE

Falls are the most frequent cause of residential injuries to children, followed by injuries from objects in the home, burns and poisonings. Store poisons out of the reach of children and properly labeled. Secure loose rugs and keep children's play areas free from hard or sharp surfaces. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and keep fire extinguishers on hand. Click [here](#) to report unsafe living conditions.

6

KEEP IT CONTAMINANT FREE

Chemical exposures to lead, radon, pesticides, volatile organic compounds, and environmental tobacco smoke harm your health. Reduce lead-related hazards in pre-1978 homes by fixing deteriorated paint and keeping floors and window areas clean using wet-cleaning approach. Test your home for radon, a naturally occurring dangerous gas that enters homes through soil, crawlspaces, and foundation crack. Install a radon removal system if levels above the EPA action-level are detected.

TIPS

- If you are a smoker, it's best to stop
 - If smoking inside, do so in a separate room well ventilated to the outside, like an open window with a fan
 - Smoke outside away from doors, vents and windows that carry smoke into the apartment
 - Isolate the clothes you smoke in (place in a plastic bag) to prevent 3rd hand smoke from contaminating the air and other surfaces
 - For help quitting, talk to your doctor
 - For free support call 1-800-QUIT NOW

KEEP IT MAINTAINED

7

POORLY MAINTAINED homes are at risk for moisture and pest problems. Deteriorated lead-based paint in older housing is the primary cause of lead poisoning. Work with your landlord to take care of minor repairs and problems before they become large repairs and problems. More information on lead and lead sources can be found at City of Chicago: [Lead Poisoning Prevention](#)

TIPS

- For guidance on working with your landlord on maintenance issues, contact MTO
- You can also go to: <https://squaredawaychicago.com/>
- If you are a tenant living in the City of Chicago and would like more information, or you are an organization that would like training in Healthy Homes, please contact contact MTO at their hotline, 773-292-4988, M-F 1-5pm.
- If you are a person with asthma, have a friend or family member with asthma, or are a healthcare provider, please visit The Chicago Asthma Consortium at www.chicagoasthma.org for a support and information

