

# Asthma and Allergy Triggers



**Over 1 million people in North Carolina have been diagnosed with asthma during their lifetimes.**

**Follow these steps to prevent or eliminate indoor and outdoor asthma and allergy triggers.**



## DUST AND DUST MITES

- Cover mattresses and pillows with dust mite proof zippered covers.
- Wash bedding (sheets, pillow cases, blankets and bedcovers) every week in hot water.
- Vacuum carpet and fabric-covered furniture every week.
- Choose washable stuffed toys, wash them often in hot water and dry them completely.
- Control humidity (as low as 30-50%) with a dehumidifier or the air conditioner.
- When cleaning dust, animal dander and other allergens, use vacuums with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters or central vacuums.
- Remove dust often with a damp cloth.
- Replace blinds with washable curtains, where possible, or regularly wipe down blinds to remove dust.

## ANIMAL DANDER

- Keep your pets out of the bedroom or other sleeping areas. Keep pets off the bed linens, carpet and upholstered furniture.
- Bathe and groom your pet's coat. Clean and brush pets outside of your home.
- If possible, keep pets outside the home.

## CHEMICAL IRRITANTS

- Don't allow smoking in your home or car.
- Quit smoking. Never smoke in the home or car. Visit [www.smokefreehousingnc.com](http://www.smokefreehousingnc.com) for steps to protect yourself from neighbors' secondhand smoke.
- Keep fireplaces, gas stoves and furnaces regularly serviced. Increase ventilation when using them.
- Read labels and follow directions when using, storing or disposing of personal care products, cleaning products, paint and glue.
- Keep these products out of reach of children.
- When possible, allow materials and finishes (such as new carpet or paint) to off-gas or dry outside.



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## MOLD AND MOISTURE

- Prevent mold by finding the source of moisture and fixing it.
- Dry water damaged areas and items within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth.
- In the kitchen and bathroom, use an exhaust fan or open a window to control moisture.
- Wipe down damp surfaces after cooking, washing dishes and bathing.
- Clothes dryers should be vented to the outside, not into the attic or crawl space.
- When mold appears, scrub mold off hard surfaces with detergent and water, and dry completely. Use appropriate respirator/mask, gloves and eye protection.
- Open windows or turn on the air conditioner to ventilate the home, especially to prevent mold growth and when using products with chemical irritants.

## PESTS

- Seal cracks or holes where cockroaches, rodents and other pests can enter.
- Use trash cans and food containers with lids.
- Clean up food and liquid spills on counters, tables and floors.
- Keep dishes clean.
- Use baits or traps, and avoid spray pesticides.

## POLLEN

- If there is a lot of pollen in the air, stay inside and keep windows up.
- Remove your shoes when you enter your home, to prevent tracking in pollen, pests, and pesticides.
- Use the air conditioner to filter air coming into the home.

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## AIR QUALITY INDEX

Children and other sensitive groups of people (such as people with asthma) should play and do other outside activities on days when the air is not hazardous, to avoid aggravating asthma and allergies.

Particulate matter (PM) is a mixture of very small particles of soot, dirt, smoke, dust and liquid droplets in the air. Ground-level ozone forms when pollutants combine in hot sunlight. Ozone levels are highest from early afternoon to early evening (about 2 to 6 pm) on hot, sunny days.

- Be sure to **check forecasts for Air Quality Action Days, PM and ozone pollution** at <http://airnow.gov/>.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*UNC Center for Environmental Health and Susceptibility: [www.sph.unc.edu/cehs](http://www.sph.unc.edu/cehs)*

*NC Division of Public Health  
Occupational and Environmental  
Epidemiology Branch  
(919) 733-3421  
<http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/oii/mold/>*

*NC Asthma Program:  
(919) 707-5213; [www.asthma.ncdhhs.gov](http://www.asthma.ncdhhs.gov)*

*US Environmental Protection Agency:  
[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)*

*NC Healthy Homes Initiative:  
<http://www.nchealthyhomes.com/>*