

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

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Is Your Purse Poison Free?

Written by Nicole Walters, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Monroe County

We have all been spending more time at home lately due to COVID-19. Most schools are still utilizing virtual learning at home in some way or another as part of their safety protocol to limit the spread of the virus. These virtual learning days may minimize exposure for the children to the coronavirus, but could potentially expose these school aged children to other hazards at home. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), calls for poisonings during the quarantine period in 2020 were higher than during the same months in 2019. While most calls were due to ingestion of cleaning supplies, they also reported an increase in consumption of hand sanitizer by children.

Hand sanitizer is just one item that may be a potential hazard we carry in our purse or bag every day. Mothers and grandmothers are notorious for having everything in an effort to be prepared for many situations. While the intent of carrying these items in our purse is to aid family members, we may be exposing them to poisonous substances like over-the-counter medications like pain relievers. These small pills may have the appearance of candy to a youngster. Medications that are not kept in childproof containers can easily be obtained and ingested by young children, resulting in an could easily ingest them and lead to an accidental poisoning. There are many other items that may be found in the purses and bags that we carry. These include items like the following.



Image Source: Pixabay

- Stain remover pens or wipes
- Cosmetic products
- Breath fresheners and mints
- Contact solution
- Eye drops
- First aid creams and ointments
- Lip gloss/lip balm
- Prescription medications
- Perfumes and colognes
- Lotions, creams and sun screen

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Creating a Safe and Healthy Early Childhood Environment

Written by Leigh Anne Aaron, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Morgan/Oconee Counties

About 87% of children under six live in a family where at least one parent is employed full-time, and 33% live in a two-parent family with both parents working full-time. Some form of child care is needed while parents are at work. Children receive child care either in their own home or in out-of-home settings (including child care centers, family child care homes, or the homes of neighbors, friends, or relatives). About 67% of Georgia's young children attend an early childhood, preschool, or prekindergarten program, and many more attend family child care or are cared for by non-parental adults in their own homes. Early childhood settings are educational experiences for young children. Children in high-quality child care programs learn valuable motor, language, cognitive, and social-emotional skills in child care that contribute to their school readiness, social skills, and emotional well-being in elementary school and beyond. Creating a safe and healthy early childhood learning environment is everyone's goal. Educators and staff are aware of the enormous responsibilities of caring for young children. Some hazards are not always immediately apparent but may have significant impact on the health and well-being of young children. The American Federation of Teachers offers these tips for improving indoor air quality, and reducing risks of communicable diseases, chemicals and pesticides in early childhood education setting.

Indoor Air Quality

- Set thermostat between 75-78 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Keep relative humidity level between 30 and 50%.
- Make sure there are no water leaks from roofs and plumbing.
- Ensure HVAC systems are designed for the space and keep them maintained according to the manufacturer's specifications.
- Bring in adequate amounts of fresh air into the building throughout the day.
- Use HEPA filters in the HVAC systems or furnaces and change them frequently.



Image Source: Pixabay

Communicable Diseases

- Proper immunization of staff and students can reduce illnesses.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Use good practices for disposing of diapers and soiled cleaning materials.
- Purchase toys that are easily cleaned or machine washable.
- Discourage the sharing of combs, hats, towels, clothing, etc.
- Encourage parents to keep children at home when they have a fever.
- Encourage staff with a fever or respiratory symptoms to stay at home.

Chemicals and Pesticides

- Use chemicals for their intended purpose and follow manufacturer's directions.
- Store chemicals in their original containers.
- Keep chemicals out of a child's view and reach, preferably in a locked cabinet or storage area.
- Follow the manufacturer's directions and local laws when disposing of chemicals.
- Post the Georgia Poison Center phone number (800-222-1222) in the center, at home, and on your phone. They provide free treatment advice 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. If a child in your care swallows a possible poison, call the Poison Center immediately. They will provide instructions for handling the situation.

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Adding a Doormat to Reduce Tracking in of Allergens

Written by Becca Stackhouse, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Crisp County

Insect fragments, lead dust, pesticides, pollen, dust mites, animal dander, human skin flakes, or fungal spores are just some what makes up your household dust. This means that between 30 to 40 percent of the dust inside your household has been brought in from the outdoor world. This can be tracked in from dust on your shoes and clothing, or from the paws and fur of your pets. Not surprisingly, much of the dust in your home can be found in the carpeting near the entryways.

Young children in your household are at greater risk for these exposures, because they are more likely to be sitting and crawling on the floor. Anyone who has asthma, a weakened immune system, or other respiratory problems should take great efforts to reduce exposure to household dust. So, what can you do to reduce indoor dust and contaminants? Start at the front door. The first four steps inside your home bring in close to 85% of the outdoor contaminates found inside your home.

- The first step is to place a doormat at all exterior and garage doors.
- The EPA recommends establishing a system that captures soil, pollutants, moisture at the door you use the most. Start with a grate-like mat, then an absorption mat, and finally a finishing mat.
- Take an additional step by taking your shoes off at the door. You can put on an indoor shoe with a non-slip sole to reduce falls inside your home.

Placing a doormat and leaving your shoes at the door can provide health benefits and reduce exposure to pesticides, lead dust, asthma and allergy triggers. Keep a healthy house for a healthy you!



Image Source: Pixabay

Healthy Home Hacks

~ Pamela Turner, UGA Extension Housing and Indoor Environment Specialist

~ Diane Bales, UGA Extension Human Development Specialist

Microwave kitchen sponges for 90 seconds to reduce bacteria. Wet your sponges before microwaving. Be careful when removing them from the microwave because they may be hot.

Polish sink fixtures with wax paper for a shiny water-repellent finish. Clean your fixtures the way you normally would and dry them thoroughly. Use a sheet of wax paper about a foot long.

Prevent your mirror from fogging by buffing a drop of full-strength dish soap into a clean, dry mirror using a paper towel. Keep rubbing until the soap disappears.

Use an over-the-door shoe organizer to store toy cars, game pieces, and other small toys. Choose one with clear pockets to make it easy for children to find things. Store toys that could be choking hazards in the top pockets out of reach of small fingers.

Seal bath toys with a drop of hot glue to keep water out and prevent mold.

Clean is the Foundation of Everything: The 8 Principles of a Healthy Home

Written by Jackie Ogden, CFCS, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Chatham County

A healthy home begins with a home that is designed, constructed, maintained, or rehabilitated that prevents disease and injuries that could result from housing-related hazards. The home environment is essential to contributing to the personal health and well-being of individuals and families. These days we all have a heightened awareness about the environment inside our homes. There are eight guiding principles of a healthy home that can help ensure that you have a healthy indoor living environment for you and your family.



- 1. Keep it Dry!** Prevent water from entering your home. Water could enter through a rain entering due to poor drainage, a leak in the roof, or damaged plumbing. Damp houses provide a nurturing environment for mold, along with roaches, mites, and rodents, all of which are associated with causing breathing problems, such as asthma.
- 2. Keep it Clean!** Control the sources of dust and contaminants by creating smooth cleanable surfaces, reducing clutter, and using effective cleaning methods. A clean and clutter-free home helps reduce pest infestations, and exposure to contaminants. Reducing clutter can help reduce stress.
- 3. Keep it Safe!** The majority of injuries to children and older adults occur in the home. Falls are a frequent cause, followed by injuries from objects in the home, burns, and poisonings. To reduce fall risks secure loose rugs and keep children's play areas free from hard or sharp surfaces. Store poisons out of the reach of children and properly label. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and keep fire extinguishers on hand.
- 4. Keep it Ventilated!** Studies show that increasing the fresh air supply in your home improves respiratory health. A whole house fan or ventilation system can supply fresh air and reduce the concentration of contaminants in your home. Use bathroom and kitchen fans to reduce contaminants.
- 5. Keep it Pest-Free!** Studies show a causal relationship between exposure to mice and cockroaches and asthma episodes in children. It's important to keep pests out, without exacerbating health problems by using pesticides that can increase risks for neurological damage and cancer. All pests look for food, water, and shelter. Seal cracks and openings throughout the home, and store food in pest-resistant containers. If needed, use sticky-traps and baits in closed containers, along with low toxicity pesticides such as boric acid powder.
- 6. Keep it Contaminant-Free!** Chemical exposures include lead, radon, pesticides, volatile organic compounds, and environmental tobacco smoke. Reduce lead-related hazards in pre-1978 home by fixing deteriorated paint and keep floors and window area clean using a wet-cleaning approach.
- 7. Keep it Well Maintained!** Inspect, clean and repair your home routinely, and take care of minor concerns before they become large repairs and problems. Poorly maintained homes are at greater risk for moisture and pest problems.

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For more information on keeping your home healthy, visit
www.georgiahealthyhousing.org

Is Your Purse Poison Free? *(continued from p. 1)*

Carrying these items in your purse while having small children requires you to pack it responsibly. Consider adding zipper pouches to contain these items. Select a pouch that is not clear and not attractive to youngsters. All medications, prescription and over the counter, should be kept in their original container. If you have small children, request that your pharmacist package your prescription medications in a child-proof container. When selecting an over the counter brand, choose the one with the child-proof lid. If your purse has a hidden compartment, consider using this area to store potential hazards. It is also a good practice to regularly check the quantities of these items in your purse if small children have access to your purse. Knowing how much you have on a regular basis will be helpful if your purse gets into the wrong little hands. If you suspect your child has consumed or ingested a poisonous product, contact your local poison control center at **1-800-222-1222**.

Safe and Healthy Early Childhood Environment *(continued from p. 2)*

- To reduce the use of pesticides, develop and implement an integrated pest management (IPM) program.
- Use a licensed pest control operator (PCO) to ensure safe, up-to-date methods are used to prevent and control pests.

Children are vulnerable to harm from environmental toxins because of their developing systems and unique behaviors, for example their proximity to the floor, mouthing behaviors, and respiratory rate. Ensure your early childhood environment is safe and healthy for all. To learn more take a free online class at <https://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/child-care>.

Clean is the Foundation of Everything *(continued from p. 4)*

8. Keep it Green! A healthy home is one that is comfortable and energy efficient. During the winter, set the thermostat to 68 degrees and in summer to 78 degrees. Fans provides cool air movement, keeping you comfortable and reducing energy costs.



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