

# Healthy Indoor Environments

*Where We Live, Learn and Play*

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Georgia Healthy Housing  
one change many impacts

## Radon and Cancer

*Written by*

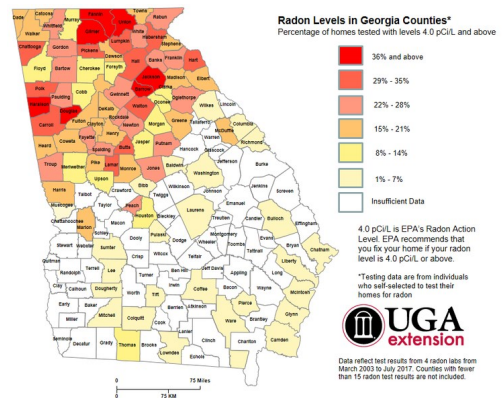
*Ines Beltran, FACS Extension Agent, Gwinnett County*

Radiation exposure can occur when radioactive materials, such as uranium and radon are released into the environment. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas and comes from rock, soil, and even well water. It moves up through the ground to the air and into your home through cracks and other holes in the foundation. You cannot see, smell or taste radon.

Radon is everywhere. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), estimates that nearly 1 out of every 15 homes in the US has elevated radon levels. You can check radon levels in your home with a do-it-yourself radon detection kit that can be ordered online or through the mail at [www.ugaradon.org](http://www.ugaradon.org); bought from an UGA Extension office; or purchased at a hardware or home supply store.

Depending on the type of kit, it should be placed in the home for anywhere from two to seven days, and then mailed to a lab for analysis.

If the test results are 4.0 pCi/L (picocuries per liter) or higher, you should take action to lower the radon level in your home.



A common concern is whether or not radon can come from granite countertops. According to the EPA, granite countertops in a home would not increase the radiation level above the normal level for that home. The main sources are the rocks and soil where the house is located. However, elevated levels of radon may be found in water that comes from deep, underground wells. UGA Extension can test your drinking water for the radionuclides—uranium and radon. Contact your local County Extension office (1-800-ASK-UGA1) for details on the cost, and collecting and submitting a water sample for testing.

### Inside this issue:

- Radon and Cancer
- Keep Store Cleaners and Medications out of Sight
- Don't Let Bed Bugs Bite
- Thick Coats and Car Seats Don't Mix
- Healthy Home Hacks and Hints

## Healthy Home Hacks

**Add a doormat and leave your shoes** in a basket by the door. These two actions will reduce about 60% of the contaminants you could track into your home. ~ Pamela Turner

**Organize** your life by making a commitment to do one thing around your home each day. It could be something like hanging a picture, planting a flower bulb, or dusting a light fixture. ~ Diane Bales

**Clean glass top stove** with a paste of baking soda and water. Wipe with a nonabrasive sponge or clean cloth. Rinse and dry thoroughly. ~ Pamela Turner

## Store Cleaners and Medications Out of Sight

Written by Rebecca Stackhouse, FACS Extension Agent - Crisp County

Children are curious and likely to use their mouths to explore the world around them. This places them in a common danger-zone of mistaking hazardous products for something to eat or drink. Since this age group is not out to read a label or see a warning, they are vulnerable. As a caregiver, one must be aware and teach children about potentially dangerous products whenever possible.

Take a few steps to make your household safer. Household cleaners and medicines should be in locked cabinets or placed on high shelves. They should be kept in original containers.

Common household cleaners can easily look like drinks or food. Pine scented cleaner looks like apple juice.

Some yellow energy drinks tend to look like lemon scented cleaning products. Even pest control products can be mistaken for candy by children. For example, mouse poison looks like some types of hard candy. Like cleaning products, pesticides should be stored out of reach and out of a child's sight.



Image source: Pixabay

Medications are often left on the countertop by the sink or in a purse where small hands can easily grab them. Grape flavored medicine can easily be mistaken for grape juice.

Gummy vitamins look like gummy candy. Vitamins are normally not considered harmful; however, an overdose of vitamins can be harmful.

It's a good idea to take medication in private so children do not confuse medications with candy.

In the event a child swallows a poisonous product or medicine, you should quickly call 1-800-222-1222 with exact information of what the child has ingested. A trip to the emergency room might be necessary or be prepared to call 911 if the child collapses or stops breathing.

Safely storing these products can help keep your child safe and



Apple Juice and House Cleaner.  
Photo by Keishon Thomas

## Helpful Hints for Healthy Indoor Environments

### ***Hint 1: Install a carbon monoxide alarm***

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas produced by incomplete combustion of any fuel like natural gas, charcoal, gasoline, kerosene, wood, gas, oil or coal. Common sources include a furnace, gas ranges, fireplaces, portable heaters, and a vehicle running in an attached garage. CO can build up indoors and poison people and animals. A CO alarm alerts you and provides time to evacuate.

### ***Hint 2: Child care facilities should be tested for radon***

Radon is a naturally occurring invisible and odorless gas that can be a concern in any type of building. It is the second leading cause of lung cancer, behind smoking. Research indicates that children are more sensitive to radon because their lungs are smaller than an adult, and their respiratory rate is twice as high. Protect the children you care for by testing the child care facility. It's easy and inexpensive to test. Learn more at [www.ugaradon.org](http://www.ugaradon.org).

## Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite

Written by

Jackie Ogden, FACS Extension Agent - Chatham County

In recent years there has been an increase in bed bug infestations in hotels and homes. Bed bugs are many times referred to as hitchhikers, since they can get into your luggage in hotels or live in secondhand items such as clothing and furniture.

During the day, bed bugs usually crowd together and hide in small spaces. Be observant since bed bugs can be found behind headboards, box springs, seams in mattresses, along baseboard in a room, on furniture and behind electrical switch covers.

Bed bugs feed on the blood of humans and other animals (cats and dogs) but do not transmit disease like other biting insects. Bites are itchy and produce red welts. Scratching can lead to a secondary skin infection. Bed bugs are hard to distinguish from other bugs, such as immature cockroaches and carpet beetles. Some signs that bed bugs are present will be the observation of dark spots, bed bug excrement on sheets or fabric, as well as, finding the shed skins of immature bed bugs or bed bug eggs. Bed bug eggs are white and the size of a pin-head. The immature bed bug is the size of a poppy seed and transparent. They become darker as they age. The adult bed bug is the size of an apple seed, flat, oval-shaped body. After feeding they are reddish/brown in color, elongated and have a balloon shaped body.

Controlling bed bugs can be difficult since bed bugs reproduce often and spread quickly. Over-the-counter pesticide products are most often ineffective, so the best way to get rid of bed bugs is to consult a pest management professional. When hiring a professional, make sure integrated pest management (IPM) methods are used. IPM methods are a combination of chemical and non-chemical methods such as heat, steam, approved pesticide use, and a HEPA-filter vacuum.

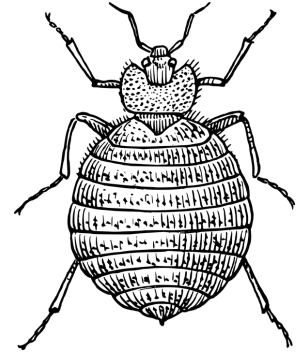


Image Source: Pixabay

*“Controlling bed bugs can be difficult since bed bugs reproduce often and spread quickly.”*

### Below are some tips to prevent an infestation of bed bugs:

- reduce clutter in your home
- vacuum frequently
- use a protective cover on your box spring and mattress
- wash clothes immediately after traveling and dry on the highest setting
- wash pet bedding regularly
- check secondhand items before bringing them into your home

Learn more about do-it-yourself bed bug on the EPA website ([www.epa.gov/bedbugs/do-it-yourself-bed-bug-control](http://www.epa.gov/bedbugs/do-it-yourself-bed-bug-control)).

For additional tips on making your home healthier, visit [www.georgiahealthyhousing.org](http://www.georgiahealthyhousing.org).

**Don't let the BED BUGS BITE: AVOIDING BED BUGS IN YOUR HOME**

**BED BUGS** have been bothersome to humans for centuries, but in recent years, bed bug populations have increased dramatically in the United States. You may have heard about bed bug infestations in hotels, or perhaps you have a bed bug issue in your own home. Bed bugs don't discriminate. Everyone needs to know basic information about bed bugs. The following will provide you with answers to common bed bug questions and help you avoid bringing them home, especially when shopping for secondhand items such as clothing and furniture.

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**WHAT ARE SOME SIGNS THAT BED BUGS ARE IN MY HOME?**

It is very important to know what you believe to be a bed bug identified by a person competent to make that identification, such as someone with Extension or a professional pest management company. If you suspect you have bed bugs, bring a bug to flight in your county Extension agent. If you live in Georgia, call **1-800-ASK-UGA1** to locate the nearest Extension office.

- Seeing and identifying live bed bugs. An accurate identification should be left professionals.
- Observing dark spots (bed bug excrement) on your fabric or sheets.
- Finding the shed skins of immature bed bugs or bed bug eggs.

**HOW DO BED BUGS ENTER MY HOME?**

Bed bugs are expert hitchhikers and there are many ways they can get into your home. Some of those ways include:

- Luggage: When traveling, bed bugs may hide in your luggage and travel with you back home. Avoid putting your luggage on hotel beds or on the floor. Instead, place your luggage on a luggage rack away from the wall.
- Guests: Visitors who have been traveling may bring bed bugs into your home unknowingly, as bed bugs may be hiding in their personal belongings. When your guests leave, inspect the room where they stayed.
- Movie theaters: Cinema or other places where people sit for extended periods are prone to bed bugs.
- Secondhand items, including clothing and furniture. Shopping at a thrift store or consignment store for furniture can be fun and is a great way to save money and find unique items, however, the items you buy may be home to bed bugs. Bed bugs can go for long periods without a blood meal. Furniture that is out by the road may look fine but could be infested with bed bugs. Be sure to check used items for bed bugs, and clean them thoroughly before bringing them into your home. Bed bugs hide in tiny holes, cracks, or along seams.

## Car Seats and Coats Don't Mix!

Written by Diane Bales, Human Development Extension Specialist

Winter is here, the weather is cold, and you may think a good way to keep your child warm is to dress him in a thick, heavy coat. That puffy coat may keep your child warm and fashionable, but did you know it can actually be *dangerous* in the car?

One important way that car seats keep children safe is by limiting the distance that they move during a crash. Those straps can only hold her safely in place if they are snug against her body. But when your child is wearing a thick, puffy coat when you strap her in, you may not realize she's not buckled in tightly. The straps may feel snug, but the thick coat can compress during a crash – making the straps too loose and increasing her risk of being ejected from the car seat.

So how can you keep your child safe and warm in the car this winter? Start by turning on the car heater and warming up the inside before putting him in the car.



Dress your child in layers instead of a thick coat. If you do dress him in a coat, take off his coat in the car, strap him in snugly, and cover him with a blanket. Some parents also turn the coat around backward and have their child put his arms through the sleeves.

If you're wondering how much difference the coat makes, try this simple test. Strap your child into her regular car seat wearing a heavy coat, and tighten the straps as you usually would. Unbuckle the straps and take her out without loosening them. Remove the coat and strap her back in – you will see how loose the straps are.

Remember to take off that thick coat before tightening the car seat straps, and you will keep your child safe and warm in the car this winter.



Images by: Pixabay



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<http://www.georgiahealthyhousing.org>

