

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

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Georgia Healthy Housing
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Preventing Accidental Poisonings Year Round

Written by Angelica B. Davis, FACS Extension Agent, Bartow County

In March we celebrated National Poison Prevention Week. Preventing accidental poisonings is a message that needs to be ongoing. At least once a month take time to highlight the dangers of poisonings for people of all ages and promote community involvement in poisoning prevention.

According to Health Resources & Services Administration, more than 90 percent of the time, poisonings happen in people's homes. Most of these poisonings occur in the kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. That is why it is important to follow simple steps to prevent a poisoning from happening in your home.

In 2021, Poison Help responded to more than 2 million human exposure cases, receiving on average one exposure case every 15 seconds. Some of the leading causes are cleaning supplies and cosmetic/personal care products - all of which are common household items. Unfortunately, 3,809 poison-related deaths were reported in 2021. This number serves as an important reminder that while poison exposures and accidents do occur, they can also be prevented with education and awareness.



(Image Source: pixabay)

According to the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), unintentional pediatric poisoning deaths spiked 37 percent in 2021, with 59 children under five years old losing their lives after gaining access to prescribed or illicit drugs. The CPSC encourages consumers to safeguard their families, especially those more vulnerable, from poisonings by taking control of potentially harmful household products, medications and drugs.

Some safety tips to note when it comes down to keeping you and family safe are below.

- Teach your family to never touch or put anything in their mouths unless they know what it is.
- When it comes down to medicines/medications, be sure to keep all of them in locked cabinets or out of the reach of children. Keep medicines in their original containers, properly labeled, and stored. Never share prescription medications.
- Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous, flammable gas that is colorless, odorless, tasteless, and comes from poorly maintained or ventilated appliances like stoves and hot water heaters. Make sure to have working carbon monoxide detectors in your home. The best places for a CO detector are near bedrooms and close to furnaces.

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Reducing Asthma Triggers in Your Home

Written by Jackie E. Ogden, FACS Extension Agent, Chatham County

Asthma is a disease that causes the airways of the lungs to tighten and swell. It is common among children and adults. An Asthma attack happens when a person has asthma, and their lungs are not getting enough air to breathe. They may cough or wheeze during an attack. If you notice that someone's breathing is faster, slower or more shallow than usual, or they can't stop coughing or wheezing, then that individual person needs to receive emergency attention. A variety of things can trigger an asthma attack.

It is important for consumers to learn what may trigger, or bring on, an asthma attack. Asthma triggers may be different for each person. For some, being around pests or dust can trigger asthma. Cockroaches and mice are common asthma triggers. Exposure to these pests can be eliminated by sealing openings around or inside cabinets. It's best to use roach baits or traps instead of sprays. Dust mites are tiny bugs that are too small to see. They live in things like sheets, blankets, pillows, mattresses, soft furniture, carpets, and a child's stuffed toys. To get rid of dust mites wash bedding once a week and dry completely. Use dust proof covers on pillows and mattresses. Also, remember to vacuum carpets and furniture every week. If you buy stuffed toys choose ones that you can wash. Be sure to dry them thoroughly.



(Image Source: pixabay)

Cigarette smoke is a common asthma trigger. If someone has asthma, do not let anyone smoke around them, either in a home or car. Also, avoid vaping around people with asthma or similar respiratory problems.

Unhealthy homes where facilities are not in good repair or kept clean may have an abundance of pests and mold. Mold is another common asthma trigger that thrives in damp places such as kitchens, bathrooms, and basements. To prevent mold growth, use exhaust fans in the bathroom and kitchen when showering, cooking, or washing dishes. If you notice a water leak, fix it immediately.

Chemical irritants found in household sprays and cleaning products can also be asthma triggers. This includes things like scented or unscented cleaners, candles, paints, adhesives, pesticides, detergents, cosmetics, and air fresheners. Reduce the number of these types of products you have in your home and always use and store as directed on the product labels.

Be sure to discuss known asthma triggers with your doctor and work with them to reduce exposure. A written action plan for both adults and children is a good way to identify daily medical needs and list rescue medicines for quick relief during an attack or at the onset of an asthma attack. This is especially important for children. A specific action plan for a child should be on file at the child care facility or with the school.

Safely Renovating an Older Home

Written by Pamela Turner, Extension Housing and Indoor Air Specialist

If you live in a house built before 1978, it may have been painted with lead-based paint.

If you are doing the work yourself, you can take steps to prevent dangerous lead dust from spreading throughout your home. Start by testing to determine if there is lead-based paint. You can assume your pre-1978 house has lead, or you can hire a certified lead inspector or lead risk assessor to test your home. If there is lead and you want to do the renovations, then follow these basic guidelines.

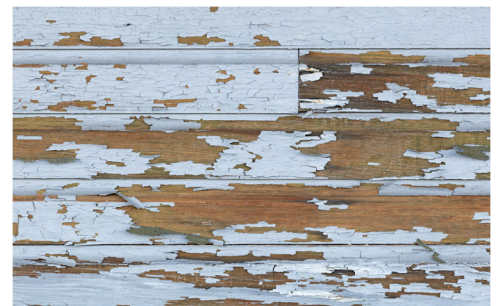


Image Source: Canva Pro

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Five Ways to Make Your Home Healthier

Written by Pamela Turner, Extension Housing and Indoor Air Specialist

We spend over 90 percent of our time indoors, so having a home environment free of contaminants is important to our health. Below are five things you can do to improve the air inside of your home.

1. Test your home for Radon. This radioactive gas comes from the natural decay of uranium and can be found in nearly all soils. It typically moves through the ground and into your home through cracks and holes in the walls, floors, and foundation. Any home can have a high radon level. To learn more about testing your home go to radon.uga.edu.
2. Keep indoor humidity below 60 percent. Excessive humidity can lead to mold growth, which can trigger asthma episodes in some sensitive individuals. Reduce the humidity in your home by using exhaust fans when bathing, or cooking; repair leaky plumbing; vent the clothes dryer to the outside; do not over water houseplants; and do not close off air vents to a room. A great low-cost investment is a hygrometer to measure the humidity inside your home.
3. Reduce the use of synthetic air fresheners. Studies have shown that some plug-in air fresheners emit up to 20 volatile organic compounds (VOCs), including 7 that are regulated as toxic or hazardous under federal laws. Synthetic fragrances can lead to respiratory problems for some individuals. To reduce VOCs in your home, use natural air fresheners, open the windows, and switch to green cleaning products. For green cleaning recipes go to <https://site.extension.uga.edu/hie/green-cleaning/>.
4. Make your home a no smoking area. Researchers have found that secondhand smoke increases a child's risk of developing asthma, cancer, sudden infant death syndrome, and ear and respiratory infections. The smoke from cigarettes contains over 4,000 chemicals. Not allowing smoking indoors is one of the best ways to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke. E-cigarettes also contain harmful substances.
5. You can reduce the contaminants you track in on your shoes by adding a doormat by exterior door and leaving your shoes at the door.



(Image Source: pixabay)

With a few changes you can live in a healthier home.

Safely Renovating an Older Home (continued)

- Set up the work area safely
- Use protective clothing and equipment
- Minimize dust
- Leave the work area clean
- Control waste
- Clean one more time

For more details and additional safe renovation guidelines visit the EPA website - <https://www.epa.gov/lead/lead-safe-renovations-diyers>.



Preventing Accidental Poisonings Year Round *(continued)*

- Laundry packets and household cleaning supplies should be stored safely, in original containers, and out of a child's sight and reach. Storing them in a locked cabinets or box is a good idea.
- Keep button cell or coin batteries and other products with accessible batteries away from children if the battery compartments do not have a screw closure or if the compartment is damaged. Be sure to check the toys in your home to make sure battery compartments are secured and do not allow children to play with or be in contact with button cell or coin batteries.
- Back to school and art supplies can contain mixtures of chemicals. They can be dangerous if not used correctly. Make sure children use art products safely by reading and following directions. Be sure to wash skin after contact with art products, clean equipment, and keep art products in their original containers.

When in doubt, it is always important to have the proper resources on hand and nearby. Poison Control Centers are available 24 hours, 7 days a week and the number is 800-222-1222. You can also receive help online at poison.org. As always if there is an emergency call 911 or go to the nearest hospital as soon as possible.

Healthy Home Hacks

~ Pamela Turner, UGA Extension Housing and Indoor Environment Specialist
~ Diane Bales, UGA Extension Human Development Specialist

- **Selfie sticks** are a great way to look for that lost sock behind the dryer, or to check the gutters without getting on a ladder.
- **Wrap a pipe cleaner around** a hanger to make it an anti-slip hanger.
- **Paint the tip of light switches with glow-in-the-dark** paint to make them easier to see at night.
- **Pick up broken glass using a slice of bread.** Gently press the bread in the area of the break, and it will pick up the small shards that are difficult to see.
- **Prevent juice box messes.** Place a juice box in a plastic cup before handing it to your child. The cup will give them something to grip and will prevent over-squeezing.
- **Weatherproof outdoor electric cords** by cutting two slits in a recycled plastic container. Thread the cord through the slits and close the container to keep water out.
- **Clean a scorched pan** by filling the bottom of the pan with water and adding 1 cup of white vinegar. Bring the mixture to a boil and then remove it from the heat. Add 2 tablespoons of baking soda.



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UGA Extension [Healthy Indoor Environments](http://healthyhomes.uga.edu)
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