

Home Characteristics and Asthma Triggers

Checklist for Home Visitors

Using this Home Assessment Can Help Make Homes Healthier.

A trained home visitor can help find common asthma triggers in homes and discuss ways to reduce and remove triggers. Removing asthma triggers in the home, along with proper medical care can improve health.

The checklist is organized into a Core Assessment plus two appendices (Dust Mite Module and Mold and Moisture Module). The Core Assessment can be used for all types of housing and climates, but the additional modules can be used if dust mites or mold/moisture issues are suspected by the trained home visitor. The suggested action items in this checklist are generally simple and low cost.



Glossary of Asthma Triggers Commonly Found in Homes

Combustion by-products

Triggers: Particles and gases that are formed when fuel is burned.

Where Found: Gas cooking appliances, fireplaces, woodstoves, candles, incense, cigarettes, and unvented kerosene and gas space heaters.

Dust Mites

Triggers: Body parts and droppings.

Where Found: Mattresses, bedding, carpeting, curtains, upholstered furniture, and stuffed toys. Dust mites are too small to be seen with the naked eye. They can survive in a range of climates, but they prefer high humidity.

Mold

Triggers: Mold spores, fragments, and odors.

Where Found: Indoor mold growth is often found in areas with more moisture such as kitchens, bathrooms, and basements, or areas where water damage has occurred. There are many types of mold and they can be found in any climate.

Pests

Triggers: Cockroaches—Body parts and droppings. Rodents—Fur, skin flakes, and urine.

Where Found: Areas with food and water such as kitchens, bathrooms, and basements.

Pets with fur

Triggers: Fur, skin flakes, and saliva.

Where Found: Throughout entire home.

Secondhand Smoke

Triggers: Mix of smoke from the burning end of a cigarette, pipe, or cigar and the smoke exhaled by a smoker.

Where Found: Anywhere that smoking is allowed.

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs)

Triggers: Chemical vapors that come from household items.

Where Found: Products such as cleaning agents, deodorizers, air fresheners, perfumes, paints, nail polish, and nail polish remover.



CORE ASSESSMENT



Building Information

Checklist Questions

Potential Action Steps

Are your living quarters in a:

- ☐ One-unit building, detached from any other building?
- ☐ One-unit building, attached to one or more buildings?
- ☐ Building with two or more apartments?
- ☐ Manufactured/Mobile Home?

Is your home:

- ☐ Owned?
- ☐ Rented?
- ☐ Occupied without payment of rent?

- If you live in a rental home, you might need to ask permission to make any changes, even minor repairs to the home. Renters often are protected under tenant's rights laws. Contact local social services agencies if you need their help.

How many stories are there in your home including attics and basements?

No. of Stories: _____

Home Interior

HEATING and COOLING

Checklist Questions

Potential Action Steps

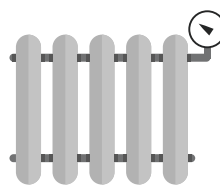
During the winter, what is the primary way your home is heated?

- ☐ Radiators
- ☐ Baseboard heater
- ☐ Forced hot air (vents)
- ☐ Space heater
- ☐ Fireplace/wood-burning stove
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ N/A

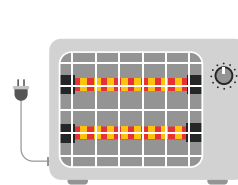
In addition to the main source of heat, do you use any other source(s)?

- ☐ Radiators
- ☐ Baseboard heater
- ☐ Forced hot air (vents)
- ☐ Space heater
- ☐ Fireplace/wood-burning stove
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ N/A

- Properly ventilate the room where a fuel-burning appliance is used and consider using appliances that vent to the outside whenever possible.
- Never use a gas-cooking appliance as a heating source.
- If using a fireplace, make sure it is properly vented to help ensure smoke escapes through the chimney.
- If using a wood-burning stove, make sure that doors are tight-fitting. Use aged or cured wood only and follow the manufacturer's instructions for starting, stoking, and putting out the fire.
- If using an unvented kerosene or gas space heater, follow the manufacturer's instructions for proper fuel to use and keep the heater properly adjusted.



Radiator



Space Heater



Baseboard Heater

Core Assessment *(continued)*

HEATING and COOLING

Checklist Questions

How do you cool your home?
(check all that apply)

- ☐ Central A/C
- ☐ Window A/C (or portable free-standing unit)
- ☐ Fans
- ☐ Evaporative cooler
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ N/A

Potential Action Steps

Central A/C units

- Replace the filters every 3 months or as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Use filters with higher efficiency than standard furnace filters, such as upgraded pleated filters, if heating or cooling system manufacturer's specifications allow.
- The Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system should have a professional inspection annually.
- Promptly repair damaged parts.

Window A/C units

- Keep drip pans clean and the drain lines flowing properly.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning or replacing filters.

Evaporative coolers (often used in very dry climates)

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning.

COOKING

Checklist Questions

What type of stove do you have?

- ☐ Gas
- ☐ Electric
- ☐ N/A

Do you use an exhaust fan when cooking on your stove?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ N/A

Does the fan exhaust to the outside?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ N/A

Potential Action Steps

- Use your exhaust fan (if it exhausts to the outside) or open a window when cooking.

SMOKING

Checklist Questions

Do any members of your household smoke tobacco inside your home?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do any visitors to your household smoke tobacco inside your home?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Potential Action Steps

- Make your home a smoke-free zone.
- Encourage household member(s) to stop smoking.

Regarding eCigarettes: eCigarette vapor can still contain toxic chemicals. Secondhand vapor might be a risk factor for triggering asthma symptoms.

Core Assessment *(continued)*

SMOKING

Checklist Questions

In the last 12 months, how often has secondhand tobacco smoke entered inside your home from somewhere else in or around the building?

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Never

Potential Action Steps

- Work with the building owner/manager and other occupants to start a smoke-free policy throughout the building.
- Use a portable air cleaner that is rated to remove tobacco smoke.

PETS

Checklist Questions

Do you have any pets in your home?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If Yes, please check all that apply:

- ☐ Cat(s)
- ☐ Dog(s)
- ☐ Bird(s)
- ☐ Other furry pets (e.g., rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, mice)
- ☐ Other non-furry pets

Talk to your healthcare provider to see if testing for allergy to your pets might be helpful for you.

- If you are allergic to pets, the best way to decrease asthma symptoms is to remove the pet from the home and thoroughly clean all surfaces in the home.
- If you are allergic, and cannot remove the pet from your home, you can decrease exposure, but it might not be enough to decrease symptoms. The best way to decrease symptoms is to do all of these things:
 - » Keep pets out of your bedroom,
 - » Wash your furry pets,
 - » Use an air cleaner with HEPA filter,
 - » Use allergen-proof mattress & pillow covers.

PESTS

Checklist Questions

In the last 12 months, have you seen cockroaches inside your home?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Potential Action Steps

Use integrated pest management (IPM) described below. For those with asthma, especially avoid the use of sprays and foggers.

IPM concepts include:

- Keep counters, sinks, tables, and floors clean and free of clutter.
- Clean dishes, crumbs, and spills right away.
- Store food in airtight containers. This also applies to pet food.
- Seal cracks or openings in cabinets, walls, baseboards, and around plumbing.
- Keep trash in a closed container.
- Use pesticide baits and traps in areas away from children and pets. Follow manufacturer's instructions for correct use.

Core Assessment *(continued)*

PESTS

Checklist Questions

Potential Action Steps

If Yes, in the last 12 months, how often have you seen cockroaches inside your home?

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ A few times a year

In the last 12 months, have you or an exterminator used any pest control measures (pesticides, traps, etc.) to control cockroaches in your home?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know



In the last 12 months, have you or an exterminator used any pest control measures (pesticides, traps, etc.) to control other insects in your home?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know



In the last 12 months, have you seen evidence of mice or rats inside your home?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know



If Yes, in the last 12 months, how often have you seen evidence of mice or rats inside your home?

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ A few times a year

In the last 12 months, have you or an exterminator used any pest control measures (pesticides, traps, etc.) to control mice or rats in your home?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

- Use integrated pest management (IPM) described above.

- Use IPM methods as described above.
- Use snap traps in areas away from children and pets.

Core Assessment *(continued)*

MOISTURE and MOLD

Checklist Questions

Is there evidence of water damage, moisture, or leaks (such as damp carpet or leaky plumbing)?

- ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know
☐ No

In the last 12 months, how often have you noticed any moldy/musty smells inside your home?

- ☐ Daily ☐ Monthly
☐ Weekly ☐ A few times a year

In the last 12 months, was there mold covering an area greater than or equal to the size of an 8" x 11" piece of paper in your home?

- ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know
☐ No

Do you use a dehumidifier?

- ☐ Yes ☐ N/A
☐ No

Do you use a humidifier?

- ☐ Yes ☐ N/A
☐ No

Potential Action Steps

- Dry damp or wet items within 24-48 hours to avoid mold growth.
- Fix water leaks (such as leaky plumbing) as soon as possible.
- Replace absorbent materials, such as ceiling tiles and carpet, if mold is present.
- Use air conditioner or dehumidifier to maintain low indoor humidity.
- Scrub mold off hard surfaces with detergent and water. Dry completely.
- Empty and clean refrigerator and air conditioner drip pans regularly.
- Run the bathroom exhaust fan or open the window when showering.

- Keep relative humidity levels in your home around 30–50%.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions and clean devices regularly to prevent mold growth.

Core Assessment *(continued)*

Key Points

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs): These chemicals are commonly found in cleaning products, perfumes, paints, and other household items. They can be harmful to all people with asthma.

- Limit exposure as much as possible by minimizing product use, using products only when person with asthma is not present, or trying alternative products.
- If products are used, carefully follow manufacturer's instructions on the label and make sure the area is well-ventilated.

Other safety hazards: Smoke and carbon monoxide can be deadly.

- Use smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms in the home. Follow manufacturer's instructions. For more information, go to www.nfpa.org/public-education/resources/safety-tip-sheets*

Outdoor air: Outdoor air pollutants and pollen can trigger asthma.

- Air pollutants and pollen can enter homes through open doors, windows, and other cracks or openings in the building.
- For current information about outdoor air quality, go to www.epa.gov/airnow

**The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) do not endorse the National Fire Protection Association. The National Fire Protection Association's website is suggested for informational purposes only.*

Other Resources About Asthma

CDC: www.cdc.gov/asthma/triggers.html

EPA: www.epa.gov/asthma/asthma-triggers-gain-control

HUD: www.hud.gov/program_offices/healthy_homes/healthyhomes/asthma

Summary Notes:

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DUST MITE MODULE

Answers in the **red checkboxes** (the first column) are associated with dust mites. The more checkmarks you have in the red column, the more likely you have high dust mite levels in your home. You can take actions shown at the end of this list.

Building

- Are all your windows sealed shut or don't open?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Is any part of your living area below ground level?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- If YES, does this area ever get wet or stay wet for long periods (more than 1 week)?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

Heating, Ventilation, and Cooling

- During winter, are some outside walls cold?** ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
- Does your air conditioner ever leak water onto walls or carpeting?** ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A (no A/C)
- Does your home sometimes smell "stuffy," "stale," or "musty?"** ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

Bedroom Characteristics of Person with Asthma

- Do you have upholstered furniture in the bedroom of the person with asthma?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you allow children to have stuffed animals/toys in the room?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

Dust Reservoirs (overall home)

- Do you have cloth sofa or chairs?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you have cloth curtains?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Can you see dust or dirt on your furniture, walls, ceiling, and curtains?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you have wall-to-wall carpeting in more than half of the rooms in your home?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you have wall-to-wall carpeting in your kitchen or bathrooms?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you vacuum less than once a week?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

Dampness

- In the last 12 months, have you noticed condensation on windows in your home?** ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
- If YES, does moisture regularly build-up on your windows/walls?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- In the last 12 months, have you had any water leaks?** ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
- Do you use a dehumidifier regularly?*** ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

*Regular use of dehumidifiers may suggest that a home is humid (dust mites prefer humid environments).

Action Steps to Decrease Dust Mites

Talk to your healthcare provider to see if testing for dust mite allergy might be helpful for you.

If you are allergic to dust mites, you need to:

- Use a device to measure relative humidity in your home. Keep relative humidity levels in your home around 30- 50%.
- Cover mattresses and pillows in special allergen-proof covers. Clean these according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Use washable bedding.
- Wash bedding weekly and dry completely
- Vacuum carpets, area rugs, and floors regularly. If possible, the person with asthma should stay out of rooms while they are vacuumed, swept, or dusted.



Summary Notes:

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MOLD AND MOISTURE MODULE

Answers in a **red checkbox** (first column) are associated with moisture and potentially mold. A **yellow checkbox** (second column) indicates medium potential for concern, and a **green checkbox** (third column) indicates low potential for concern.

The more checkmarks you have in **red checkboxes**, the more likely it is that you have moisture and mold in your home. You can take actions shown at the end of this list.

Building

Is there a crawlspace under the building? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

Are any of the bedrooms in the basement ☐ Yes ☐ No

NOTE: Many crawl spaces and basements are damp and may have mold that can enter the home.

Heating , Ventilation and Cooling

In the bathroom where you shower or bathe, does the exhaust fan work? ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐ Yes
☐ N/A

If YES, how frequently do you use it when showering or bathing? ☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ All the time ☐ N/A

Does your kitchen vent exhaust outdoors? ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐ Yes
☐ N/A

Does your clothes dryer exhaust outdoors? ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ N/A

NOTE: Properly maintained exhaust fans that vent to the outdoors can reduce humidity levels. If there are no exhaust fans or the exhaust fans do not work or do not vent outside, high humidity can develop in the home and can lead to mold growth.

Carpet

Do you have wall-to-wall carpeting in your kitchen or bathrooms? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What kind of floor covering is in the bedroom? ☐ Wall-to-wall carpeting ☐ Some carpeting ☐ All smooth floor

NOTE: Carpeting in areas that are prone to water spills can be hard to dry. Damp carpeting can lead to mold growth and create a place where dust mites can thrive.

Dampness

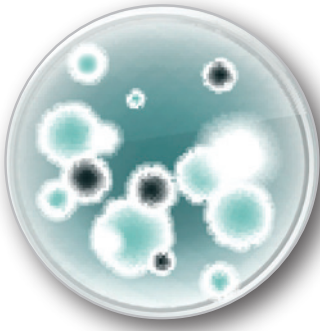
In the last 12 months, have you noticed condensation on windows in your home? ☐ Yes ☐ No

NOTE: Condensation (water droplets) on windows is a sign that moisture you may not see is forming on other surfaces. Even though you can't see this moisture, it can lead to mold growth.

Have any of your furnishings, clothes, possessions been in a building that had water damage? ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ No

NOTE: Anything that was water-damaged could have mold. Bringing those items into a new home could lead to more mold in the new home.

Action Steps to Decrease Moisture and Mold



- Dry damp or wet items within 24-48 hours.
- Fix water leaks (such as leaky plumbing) as soon as possible.
- Replace absorbent materials, such as ceiling tiles and carpet, if mold is present.
- Use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier to maintain 30-50% relative humidity indoors.
- Scrub mold off hard surfaces with detergent and water. Dry completely.
- Empty and clean refrigerator and air conditioner drip pans regularly.
- Use the bathroom exhaust fan or open the window when showering.

Summary Notes:

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For more information please contact

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