



MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

REDUCING ALLERGENS IN THE HOME A ROOM-BY-ROOM GUIDE*

Allergens in the home hide in unexpected places. Nooks and crannies, children's toys, a friendly pet – can all be unfortunate sources for asthma-triggering allergens. Dust mites, mold, pet dander, cockroaches, rodents and even pollen brought in from the outdoors can trigger an allergic asthma attack in people living with the condition and can interfere with the most routine tasks of life like sleeping, working and playing.

This room-by-room guide teaches people how to identify places in the home where allergens can hide and practical tips they can use to help them remove these allergic asthma triggers from their home.

Bedroom

Many people like to snuggle at night with their pooch Fluffy or cat Missy. What many people don't know, though, is that allergens around the house and in their bedroom often come from their pets. Pets can bring in mold, dander (little flakes off of their skin and coats), and pollen from outdoors. Pet dander settles on bed linens and becomes a food for dust mites. And even if you don't have an animal, pillows and blankets in the bedroom are frequently homes for mold and dust mites. In particular, mold is frequently found in mattresses and pillows and releases spores that can trigger asthma symptoms.

You can combat these unwanted visitors by:

- Using special mite-proof mattress and pillow covers
- Washing sheets once a week in 130-degree hot water to kill dust mites and their eggs, and use bleach when washing to kill mold
- Washing pillows and pet beds/mats once a month
- Never allowing pets on the bed
- Keeping pet sleeping areas and/or bird cages out of bedrooms
- Replacing mattresses every 10 years
- Replacing pillows every 5 years

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Kid' Room

Allergens can hide in the most unlikely places: on stuffed animals, in drawers, and under rugs. All of these things, of course, can be found in your kids' rooms. Dust mites, mold, and pet dander accumulate in and on children's toys, especially when pets play with them, and can trigger allergic asthma symptoms. Damp clothes, carelessly tossed aside after play, become a home for mold and mites in drawers and other dark places. The space underneath wall-to-wall carpeting is another refuge for mold.

Create a "healthy-room" for your child by:

- Using special mite-proof mattress and pillow covers
- Washing sheets once a week in 130-degree hot water to kill dust mites and their eggs, and use bleach when washing to kill mold
- Washing stuffed toys every week in 130-degree hot water to kill mites and their eggs, and use bleach when washing to kill mold
- Placing unwashable stuffed toys in the freezer once a week for 24-hours to kill mites, then rinsing them in cold water to remove dead mites
- Keeping kids' toys away from pets, and storing them in a covered, dry place where pets can't get them
- Not allowing your kids to sleep with stuffed toys (mites from the bed will get onto the toys, and vice versa)
- Making sure all clothes are fully dry before putting them in drawers and closets
- Telling kids to wipe their feet and shake out their coats before coming inside, to keep any outside pollen from coming in on their clothes
- Telling kids to put their clothes right in the laundry after coming in from the outdoors, rather than on the floor or back in drawers, to minimize pollen exposure

Kitchen

Cockroaches are one of the main offenders in the kitchen. Their droppings and even their microscopic sheddings can trigger allergic asthma attack. Mold also finds its way into the kitchen, frequently turning up under the sink, refrigerator, and dishwasher, damp spaces where it thrives.

Ways to keep allergens out of the kitchen:

- Never leave food or garbage out to attract roaches
- Store food in airtight containers in or out of the refrigerator
- Wipe the stovetop right after cooking to remove food particles that attract insects, and moisture that can lead to mold
- Remove crumbs and/or spilled items on countertops right away
- Use poison baits, boric acid and insect traps to kill cockroaches. People with asthma should avoid using liquid or spray pesticides.
- Wash dishes immediately after eating; don't pile in the sink
- Use a covered/sealed trash can in the kitchen

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- Keep stovetop items covered, and use the kitchen fan when cooking to keep steam and moisture from condensing on kitchen surfaces
- Use easy-to-clean kitchen flooring, and wash floor mats weekly to remove small food particles

Bathroom

Warm damp environments are the breeding ground for mold. As in the kitchen, you can often find it under the bathroom sink, as well as in the shower and on shower doors, towels, floor mats, and tiles.

Tips for removing allergens in the bathroom:

- Remove mold as soon as you see it anywhere in the bathroom
- Fix leaky pipes under the sink, in the shower/tub, and behind the toilet
- Use the fan/vent when showering to keep air circulating and reducing moisture in the air
- Use washable floor mats, and wash them weekly
- Use a mold/mildew spray to clean moldy areas, including shower curtains, tiles, etc.
- Wash the “show towels” and bath towels weekly to remove any mold spores
- Wipe the sink and counter every day to remove puddles of water and moisture

Living Room

The family room should be a place for quality time, but allergens found in this room of the house can turn an enjoyable family evening into a night of worry. Dust mites find their way into furniture as easily as they do into beds: they lay eggs in upholstery, and leave droppings and sheddings that can trigger allergic asthma symptoms. Mold, too, can grow on upholstered furniture, as well as on curtains and drapes. Cockroaches, no snobs to food wherever they can find it, will be drawn to crumbs around the floor of the den just as quickly as they go for it in the kitchen.

Tips for removing allergens in the living room:

- Vacuum furniture and curtains/drapes once a week
- Use washable slip covers and cushions, and wash in 130-degree hot water once a week
- Keep pets off of the furniture
- Use easy-to-clean flooring, and avoid carpeting where moisture can get trapped and help mold to grow
- Use blinds and other easy-to-clean window treatments, or wash and dry curtains once a month
- Never eat on the floor or on furniture where crumbs can attract roaches

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Basement

Whether your basement is a room for child's play or clothes washing, it's a favorite space for allergens. Cockroaches find their way into there, where they leave their usual sheddings and droppings. Rats make their presence known the same way. Mold also easily grows in the dark, damp atmosphere, especially around beams and pipes, and releases spores which can trigger allergic asthma symptoms.

To remove allergens from the basement:

- Find and fix all leaks, seams, and cracks in the foundation that let moisture seep in
- Fix leaks and drips in pipes, and in and around the water heater, and central HVAC system
- Remove and clean mold wherever it appears

General tips to reduce your exposure to allergens at home:

House Dust

Ordinary house dust actually makes up a collection of all types of allergens – pollen from outdoors, pet and human dander, mites, dirt, insect droppings, mold, and more – all of which can trigger a frightening asthma attack in people with allergic asthma. Keep all hard and soft surfaces wiped and vacuumed weekly to reduce house dust overall.

Windows/Doors

Window sills and door jams are also very likely places to find mold. Be sure to wipe window sills and doors weekly and use a mold and mildew spray to clean these areas to prevent mold growth

Flooring

Every type of flooring is a potential breeding ground for allergens, whether it's carpet, tile, or hardwood. Be vigilant about keeping these surfaces clean. Do not install wall-to-wall carpeting if you don't have to, since it is harder to remove moisture, mold, and other allergens that are hidden in it. Vacuum all flooring weekly.

Humidity

Mites and mold both thrive on humidity around the house. Use a de-humidifier in bedrooms and other areas to keep humidity to 50% or less.

Air Filtration

Allergens are tiny and light – perfect for taking wing in the ducts and open air of spaces around your house. Use HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filters in your whole house central air system, or in room air cleaning devices. Replace filters regularly.

** These tips have been developed by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America under the guidance of experts in the field of asthma and home allergens. People with allergic asthma should always talk first to their doctor before making any changes.*