



Do it for a Healthy Home

Every day, we are exposed to chemicals and pollutants in the air, water, soil, food and products we use in our home. Here are some tips on how to protect yourself and those around you.

For more information visit Canada.ca/Healthy-Home

All rooms/Living room

Remove outdoor footwear

Take off your shoes in your home. When you are outside, your shoes can pick up dirt and harmful chemicals, which you can track into your home.

Make your home smoke-free

Toxic chemicals found in tobacco and cannabis smoke are inhaled when people breathe in second-hand smoke. Non-smokers exposed to second-hand smoke have an increased risk of lung cancer, coronary heart disease and respiratory illnesses.

Keep dust and dirt away

Clean hard floors and surfaces with a wet cloth or mop to remove dust and dirt. Vacuum weekly. If possible, use a vacuum with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to trap small particles, including dust. Exposure to dust and dust mites can cause allergic reactions and trigger pre-existing health conditions such as asthma.

Prevent the spread of mould

Inspect your home for visible signs of mould or areas with too much moisture. Look for stains or discolouration on floors, walls, window panes, fabrics and carpets. Check for a musty "earthy" odour. If you find small amounts of mould, clean them up with dish soap and water. You don't need to use bleach. Consider hiring a professional to clean up large areas of mould, or if the mould keeps coming back after you clean it. Be sure to fix the underlying cause (water damage, too much humidity or not enough ventilation)

to prevent more mould from coming back. Exposure to mould can lead to health effects, like eye, nose and throat irritation, and can make asthma symptoms worse.

Control moisture levels in your home

Keep humidity levels between 30 and 50%, using a humidifier or dehumidifier if necessary. Low humidity may aggravate skin allergies and cause respiratory infections. High humidity can lead to mould.

Use your fireplace safely

Ensure your gas or wood fireplace is properly installed, maintained and used. Improperly maintained gas or wood fireplaces may emit carbon monoxide (CO), particles, and other pollutants. Exposure to CO can lead to health problems ranging from tiredness and headaches to chest pain and even death, depending on how much CO is in the air.

Reduce the use of candles and incense

Candles and incense can be a source of particles and other indoor air pollutants. Particles typically consist of smoke, soot, liquid or solid particles in aerosol, or biological matter like mould, bacteria, pollen and animal dander. They can be harmful to your health if you inhale them.

Ventilate your space

Keep your home well ventilated by opening the windows or running your kitchen or bathroom exhaust fan to prevent buildup of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). VOCs are a large group of chemicals that are present in indoor and outdoor air. Some have an odour while others do not. VOCs can cause breathing problems, headaches, and irritation to the eyes, nose and throat. New household products like furniture, mattresses, cabinets, building materials, wallpaper, paints, varnishes and glues can emit gases into your indoor air. This is known as "off-gassing."

Check for lead paint

Homes built before 1991 may have lead-based paint or base coats of lead-based paint beneath the newer ones. Have the paint in your home tested if you think it may contain lead. A certified inspector can measure paint lead levels in your home, or you can mail paint chip samples to a testing laboratory. If you have lead-based paint, consider hiring a professional to remove it. Painting over it can be an acceptable option if the underlying leaded paint isn't disturbed. Don't sand, scrape or burn off leaded paint as it can release harmful dust. Lead can cause many harmful health effects, especially to your brain, nervous system, blood system and kidneys. Exposure to lead, even at low levels, poses the greatest risk to young children because their bodies are still developing.

Check for asbestos

Before 1990, asbestos was commonly used for fireproofing and insulating against cold weather and noise. You may wish to contact a professional to test for asbestos if you're planning renovations or demolitions and your home has building materials that you think may contain asbestos. This includes materials like insulation, exterior siding, floor or ceiling tiles, cement and plaster. If a professional finds asbestos, hire a qualified asbestos removal specialist to get rid of it before starting work. Avoid disturbing asbestos materials yourself since this could increase the risk to your health and your family's health. Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause cancer and other diseases. There are usually no significant health risks if materials containing asbestos are tightly bound in products and in good condition, sealed behind walls and floorboards, isolated in an attic, and left undisturbed.

Test for radon

Radon is a radioactive gas that comes from the breakdown of uranium in soil and rock. Do a long-term radon test for 3 months to measure the level of radon in your home. The results will help determine whether you need to reduce the radon level in your home. Follow test kit instructions to place the detector in the lowest level of your home (basement or first floor) where you spend at least 4 hours a day. Exposure to radon is the number 1 cause of lung cancer in non-smokers.

Reduce ozone in your home

Choose air purifiers carefully as some air purifiers and other electronic equipment release small amounts of ozone into your home. We advise against using products that intentionally release ozone, such as ozone air purifiers, into your home. Ground-level ozone is a key component in urban smog and can pollute indoor air. Prolonged exposure to ozone can result in decreased lung function.

Kitchen

Wash your hands

Wash your hands with soap and warm, running water for at least 20 seconds before and after touching food, and after using the washroom, changing diapers, or touching, feeding or cleaning-up after pets. Washing your hands often helps prevent infection and reduce exposure to harmful substances. In most cases, you don't need antibacterial or antimicrobial soap for safe, effective hand hygiene.

Wash surfaces and utensils often

Wash surfaces, like counters and cutting boards, and utensils with soap and hot water. This will help reduce the risk of bacteria growth and food poisoning.

Wash fresh fruits and vegetables

Use clean, running water that is safe to drink. We don't recommend washing fresh produce with soap, chlorine (bleach) or other chemicals. Fresh produce is porous and can absorb chemicals that you aren't meant to eat.

Test for lead in your drinking water

Get your tap water tested if you live in an older home or neighbourhood and you think you may have lead in the plumbing. Lead can cause many harmful health effects, especially to your brain, nervous system, blood system and kidneys. Exposure to lead, even at low levels, poses the greatest risk to children because their bodies are still developing.

Reduce your exposure to lead in your drinking water

If you're concerned about lead or other metals in your drinking water, let tap water run until it's cold before using it for drinking, cooking or preparing baby food. This can help reduce your risk of exposure to lead and other metals from your plumbing. Every month, inspect the aerators or screens at the tap. If you find debris, clean it out to remove any particles that may contain lead. A household water filter at the tap is an effective way to remove lead from your water. Ensure that you install and maintain the filter properly, and that it's certified to the NSF International standard for removal of lead.

Consider replacing lead pipes

If you have a lead service line, consider having it completely removed. Contact your water utility to coordinate the replacement of both the water utility and homeowner portions of the service line. In most communities, the municipality is only responsible for a portion of the service line and you are responsible for the other portion, usually from the curb to the home.

Use your range hood when cooking

Operate a range hood on the highest setting when using your oven or stove to vent water vapour and air pollutants. If you don't have a range hood or fan that vents outside, open windows when possible. Tiny particles of cooked food, fat and oil get into the air when we fry, roast, broil, sauté, toast, bake or burn food.

Use your gas stove safely

Ensure your gas stove is properly installed, maintained and used. Improperly maintained gas stoves may emit carbon monoxide (CO), particles, and other pollutants. Exposure to CO can lead to health problems ranging from tiredness and headaches to chest pain and even death, depending on how much CO is in the air. Never use aluminum foil to line the bottom of your gas oven. Keep the openings and vents on your gas oven clear from blockages to prevent gas leaks and fire hazards.

Use microwave safe containers

Remove food from any packaging that isn't microwave-safe, such as styrofoam trays or some plastic containers, before heating. Use glass, ceramic and plastic containers and plastic wrap that are labelled microwave safe. Single-use containers, like margarine or yogurt tubs, tend to warp or melt in the microwave, potentially causing harmful chemicals to leach into your food.

Store your food safely

Store food in food-grade containers, such as glass or stainless steel. If you are using plastic containers, ensure they are safe for storing food. Avoid pouring hot liquids into plastic containers not intended for holding hot food. The heat may allow the plastic to leach into your food.

Buy, use and store household chemical products safely

Read the label and follow all instructions for safety, use and disposal. Look for and understand hazard symbols found on the front of household chemical products. Store household chemical products, tightly closed in their original containers. Keep them safely locked away and out of reach and sight of children and pets. Call a poison control centre or your health care provider right away if you suspect someone has been harmed by a household chemical product. Keep these products away from food, water sources, and open flames.

Avoid using boric acid while doing arts and crafts

Avoid using boric acid (borax, contact lens solution, eye wash solution) to make slime, dough, putty or modeling clay. Overexposure to boric acid could affect human development and reproduction. To reduce exposure, wash your hands after use and be careful not to get any in your mouth.

Bathroom

Vent bathroom

Use an exhaust fan or open your windows when showering or running a bath to prevent excessive humidity, which can lead to mould. Let the fan run for a few minutes after you're done. Clean bathroom fans. Exposure to mould can lead to health effects, like eye, nose and throat irritation, and can make asthma symptoms worse.

Prevent mould

Seal your tubs and sinks tightly. Leaks can allow water to collect behind walls or under cupboards or floors, providing a damp place for mould to grow. Clean small amounts of mould with dish soap and water. You don't need to use bleach. Consider hiring a professional to clean up large areas of mould, or if the mould keeps coming back after

you clean it. Exposure to mould can lead to health effects, like eye, nose and throat irritation, and worsening of asthma symptoms.

Reduce your exposure to volatile organic compounds (VOCs)

Minimize the use of scented products, such as plug-in or aerosol deodorizers (air fresheners). These products can hide odours by producing VOCs. VOCs can cause breathing problems, headaches, and irritation to the eyes, nose and throat.

Minimize your exposure to talc

Avoid inhaling loose powders containing talc, as it may be harmful to your lungs. Using products containing talc on the female genital area may cause ovarian cancer.

Wash your hands

Wash your hands with soap and warm, running water for at least 20 seconds before and after touching food, and after using the washroom, changing diapers or touching, feeding or cleaning-up after pets. Washing your hands often helps prevent infection and reduce exposure to harmful substances. In most cases, you don't need antibacterial or antimicrobial soap for safe, effective hand hygiene.

Use household chemical products safely

Read and follow safety, usage, and disposal instructions carefully when using household chemical products. Never mix household chemical products together. Some mixtures, such as bleach and ammonia, can produce harmful gases. When you aren't using them, keep household chemicals locked away and out of reach and sight of children and pets. Call a poison control centre or your health care provider right away if you suspect someone has been harmed by a household chemical product.

Dispose of medications and household chemical products safely

Bring unused and expired prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications and natural health products to your local pharmacy for proper disposal. Take leftover household chemical products to a hazardous waste disposal depot. Be sure to check with your municipality. Don't put medications or chemical products down the drain or flush them down the toilet. Proper disposal will help prevent the contamination of our soil, air and water.

Bedroom

Install certified smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms

Buy smoke and CO alarms with a Canadian certification mark such as CSA, cUL, ULC or cETL directly on the product. Install at least 1 CO alarm particularly in hallways near bedrooms, preferably 1 per floor. Test your smoke and CO alarms regularly. Replace the batteries and the alarm itself as recommended by the manufacturer. Exposure to CO

can lead to health problems ranging from tiredness and headaches to chest pain and even death, depending on how much CO is in the air.

Reduce dust and particulate matter

Use mattress and pillow covers. Vacuum carpets and wash bedding weekly. If possible, use a vacuum with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to trap small particles, including dust. Clean hard floors and surfaces with a wet cloth or mop to remove dust and dirt. Exposure to dust and dust mites can cause allergic reactions and make pre-existing health conditions, such as asthma, worse.

Reduce exposure to flame retardants

Ensure stuffed toys, mattresses or pillows that contain foam aren't torn or worn out, exposing the foam. This will help to reduce your exposure to some flame retardants. Flame retardants are used to help keep items from catching on fire and to limit the spread of fire.

Laundry room

Vent the clothes dryer

Vent the clothes dryer to the outside through the roof or wall to prevent excess moisture and mould growth. Exposure to mould can lead to health effects like eye, nose and throat irritation, and can make asthma symptoms worse.

Store laundry pods, laundry packets and stain remover safely

Laundry pods and packets can be attractive to children, and adults with cognitive impairment, and mistaken for food or toys because of their small size and bright colours. Seek immediate emergency medical attention if you suspect someone has swallowed one of these products. If swallowed, these products can result in severe abdominal pain, vomiting or breathing difficulty.

Basement

Maintain furnace and other equipment

Improve your indoor air by ensuring your water heater, furnace, and heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) are maintained and routinely inspected by a professional. Consult your user manual or HVAC technician for information on recommended filter types for your furnace. Remember to replace or clean your furnace filter regularly, as per manufacturers' instructions. Consider a heat recovery ventilator (HRV) or energy recovery ventilator (ERV) as part of your HVAC system to improve indoor air. Regular maintenance will help prevent carbon monoxide (CO) exposure. Exposure to CO can lead to health problems ranging from tiredness and headaches to chest pain and even death, depending on how much CO is in the air.

Reduce the potential for mould

Install a dehumidifier in damp or humid areas of your home such as your basement. If you use the basement for storing items, use plastic bins with lids instead of cardboard. Mould can grow on cardboard boxes if they get wet. Exposure to mould can lead to health effects, like eye, nose and throat irritation, and can make asthma symptoms worse.

Garage

Prevent carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning

Keep the door between your house and garage closed, ensuring it shuts tightly and is well sealed. Don't idle your vehicle in the garage, even when the garage door is open. Never use gas-powered machines, barbeques, portable fuel-burning camping equipment or fuel-burning generators in your home or garage. If possible, choose fuel-burning generators with a built-in sensor that causes the generator to shut down if CO builds up to dangerous levels. Consider adding an exhaust fan to your attached garage. Exposure to CO can lead to health problems ranging from tiredness and headaches to chest pain and even death, depending on how much CO is in the air.

Store household chemical products safely

Store products tightly closed in their original containers. Keep them locked away and out of reach and sight of children and pets. When possible, store chemicals, fuel containers and gas-powered equipment in a building not attached to the house (like a shed) to keep you safe from exposure to volatile organic compounds (VOCs). If you live in an apartment or condo, consult with your landlord or condo board.

Dispose of household chemical products safely

Take leftover household chemical products to a hazardous waste disposal depot. Be sure to check with your municipality.

Outdoor space

Prevent leaks to reduce the potential for mould

Make sure your roof, foundation and walls don't leak. Ensure that the ground around your home slopes away from the foundation wall to prevent water from leaking into the basement. Check basement pipes for condensation or dripping. Insulate pipes in order to reduce humidity. Fix any leaking pipes.

Keep your chimney clean

Check your chimney to ensure it isn't blocked and that it's cleaned once a year so pollutants are vented outside.

Store chemical products safely

Store pesticides, fertilizers, fuels and fuel-burning equipment in a storage cabinet or, if possible, a locked shed, separated from your home's ventilation system. This will help prevent chemical fumes from these products from entering your home. If you live in an apartment or condo, consult with your landlord or condo board.

Check the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)

Pay attention to the AQHI. The AQHI is a scale from 1 – 10 that measures outdoor air quality. The hottest days of the year are often those with the worst air quality. If you have an air conditioner, make sure it works properly before the hot weather starts. If you don't have air conditioning, find an air-conditioned spot close by where you can cool off for a few hours on very hot days.

Keep poor outdoor air from entering your house

Keep windows closed when the outdoor air quality is poor, such as during wildfires or extreme heat. Help keep poor outdoor air from coming into your house by ensuring windows, doors and skylights are tightly sealed. Repair or replace weather stripping and caulking as required.

Use insect repellent safely

Always read the product label carefully before use and follow all directions. Insect repellent can help protect you against diseases spread by ticks and mosquitoes, such as Lyme disease and West Nile.

Use pesticides safely

Always read the product label carefully before use and follow all directions, if you choose to use a pesticide. Only use a pesticide that is authorized for use in Canada and be sure to check with your municipality for pesticide by-laws.

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