



# PREVENTING ASTHMA

A Landlord's Guide to Property Maintenance for Healthy Homes

Asthma is one of the most common childhood chronic diseases. In 2001, it affected over 6 million children under the age of 18 in the United States. One study found that 14% of Detroit elementary school students have been diagnosed with asthma. Another 14% of students have asthma symptoms without a diagnosis. Maintaining a healthy home can reduce triggers of asthma symptoms. Landlords and tenants both have responsibilities to maintain healthy homes. Both will benefit from living in and renting healthy spaces.

## What triggers asthma?

Asthma can be triggered by both indoor and outdoor factors. Indoor asthma triggers include:

- Mold
- Cracks in the home that allow outside asthma triggers to move indoors
- Pests, such as cockroaches and dust mites

Outdoor asthma triggers include:

- Pollen
- Dust
- Diesel Exhaust
- Ozone

## How can maintaining a healthy home benefit landlords?

- **Increase Durability** – Watching for health risks may also alert you to signs of increased wear and tear on systems (heating and cooling) and hidden structural damage (wood rot and mold).
- **Reduce Cost** - Replacing or fixing systems when the problems are smaller can save you money. A small water leak can be quickly repaired, or it can grow into larger mold and rotting problems.
- **Improve Resident Health** - Home conditions can both cause and trigger asthma and allergies. Unhealthy tenants may miss work or rent payments.
- **Reduce Liability** - Addressing potential health hazards in your buildings can reduce the likelihood of costly lawsuits and code violations.

Resources: Asthma Regional Council, "Property Maintenance for a Healthy Home" (2003).

## What can landlords do?

Check the following items twice a year and when new tenants move in:

- **Moisture** - Check for water stains and wet spots under windows and near doors, near appliances, and around toilets, tubs, and showers.
- **Cleanable Surfaces** - Check for dust, debris, mold, and conditions that make it hard to clean a surface. This includes checking for damage to floor coverings and carpet. If possible, clean the carpets in each unit twice a year.
- **Ventilation** – Check that the air conditioning and heat work properly. Make sure all windows open easily. Check that bath and kitchen ventilate outside. Change heating and air conditioning filters every 6 months.
- **Pests** -- Check for evidence of insects or rodent droppings. Check for holes that would let insects or rodents to enter the building. If extermination is needed, use Integrated Pest Management for a non-toxic alternative to traditional techniques.

## Landlord Information Sources

- Detroit Building, Safety, and Engineering Department: (313) 224-3105
- Health Department: (313) 876-4516
- Detroit Planning and Development website: [www.ci.detroit.mi.us/plandevl](http://www.ci.detroit.mi.us/plandevl)
- Larry Swain, Michigan Dept. of Agriculture, Plant & Pest Management: 517-373-1087

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