

Help Yourself to a **Healthy Home**

Protect Your Children's Health



U.S. Department
of Housing and
Urban Development,
Mel Martinez, Secretary

- Indoor Air Quality
- Asthma & Allergies
- Mold & Moisture

- Carbon Monoxide
- Lead
- Drinking Water

- Hazardous Household Products
- Pesticides
- Home Safety

Help Yourself to a *Healthy Home*

You want to take good care of your family. You try to eat healthy foods. You take your children to the doctor for regular checkups. You try your best to protect your family from accidents and illness. You want to live in a safe neighborhood and home.

But did you know your home might have hidden dangers to your children's health? Ask yourself:

- Is the air in your home clean and healthy?
- Do your children have breathing problems, like asthma?
- Is someone in your home allergic to mold?
- Do you know the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning?
- Is there lead anywhere in your home?
- Is your tap water safe to drink?
- Do you have household products with chemicals in them that can make you sick?
- Do you use bug spray or other products to keep away pests?
- Do you keep poisons where your children can reach them?

The answers to questions like these will help you learn if your home is safe and healthy. This booklet will make it easier to answer these and other important questions about your home and how you live in it. It will also give you ideas about how to protect your children's health. It is up to you to make sure your home is a healthy home, but there are lots of places to go for help.

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Why *Should You* Be Concerned?

Some of the most serious health problems for children may start at home. This booklet explains some of these health concerns and what you can do about them.

Most people spend over 90% of their time indoors.

Indoor Air Quality

Is the air in your home healthy? The air inside can be more harmful to your family's health than the air outdoors. Air can be unhealthy if it has too many pollutants. Indoor air pollutants can be lots of things—from oven cleaner to cigarette smoke to mold. It is not always easy to tell if your home has unhealthy air. You may notice bad smells or see smoke, but

you cannot see or smell other dangers, like carbon monoxide or radon. This chapter will help you learn if your home has healthy air. *See page 6.*

The number of children with asthma has doubled in the past 10 years.
1 in 15 children under 18 years of age have asthma.

Asthma & Allergies

Allergies and asthma are health problems that have a lot to do with the air you breathe. You and your children spend a lot of time at home, so the air inside needs to be clean. Does

someone you live with smoke? Do you have pets? Is your basement damp? These may cause or add to breathing problems. *To learn more about asthma and allergies, see page 11.*

Mold & Moisture

Other health and safety problems may come from the air in your home too. Too much dampness causes mold to grow. Some mold is

very harmful and some can make allergies or asthma worse. *See page 17 to find out more about mold.*

Carbon Monoxide

If they are not working right, stoves and heaters may cause a deadly gas called *carbon monoxide* to build up. You cannot see or smell this danger, but you can help keep your loved ones safe from

carbon monoxide poisoning. *See page 23 to learn more about how to protect your family from carbon monoxide.*

Lead

Can your children be poisoned by lead in your home? Some house paint and water pipes contain lead. This metal can poison your children. Most problems with lead come from old paint. Lead was also in gasoline and got into the soil and air from car exhaust. It's not used in these ways any more. There's still plenty of lead around though.

Lead can poison your children if they get it into their mouths or breathe it in from the air. If a pregnant woman gets lead in her body, it can harm her unborn baby.

Lead poisoning can be a serious problem for young children. It can cause problems with learning, growth, and behavior that last a lifetime. Even small amounts of lead can harm children.

Turn to page 29 to find out about lead poisoning in your home.



FACT
One in 20 American children have too much lead in their bodies.

Drinking Water

Is your drinking water safe? Do you know where your drinking water comes from? If it comes from your own well, you need to make sure it is safe to drink. Have your water tested every year to make sure it does not have chemicals or other pollutants in it that can make your family sick. There are things you can do to take care of your well and keep the water clean. *See page 35 for ideas.*

You may get your drinking water from a water company or utility. They always test the

water before they pipe it to you to make sure it is safe. You can ask the company or utility for a report on what the tests found. Even if it is o.k. at the water utility, water can still become unsafe after it comes into your home. *Look at page 33 to see if your water is safe to drink.*

FACT
95% of people living in rural areas use private wells for their drinking water.

Hazardous Household Products

What harmful products do you have in your home? Some products can harm your family's health if you do not use them in the right way. Common chemicals like bleach, rat poison, paint strippers, and drain cleaners can be dangerous. Children can poison themselves if they get into products like these. Even very small amounts of some chemicals can cause health problems if you touch them or breathe them in. Remember—if you spray or pump

something, it goes right into the air. When you and your family breathe, those chemicals go into your bodies. *See page 38 to learn more about how to use, store, and dispose of household products.*

Thousands of children die each year from chemicals stored and used improperly in the home.

Pesticides

Do you use pesticides in your home? Almost every household uses *pesticides*. Bug spray, flea powder, rat poison, and garden weed killer are all types of pesticides. They have chemicals in them that kill pests. This also means they may harm you and your family. If you do not use them safely, some pesticides may cause serious health problems—poisoning, birth defects, nerve damage, and even cancer.

Your children can come into contact with pesticides in many ways. You can take simple steps to protect them from pesticides. *See page 42 to see if you are using pesticides safely!*

Nearly one-half of households with a child under age five had pesticides stored within reach of children.

Home Safety

Did you know that your chances of getting hurt at home are much higher than they are at work or school? The leading causes of death in the home are falls, drowning, fires, poisoning, suffocation, choking, and guns. Very young children and older adults are the people most likely to get hurt at home. It's important to keep people's age in mind when thinking

about home safety.

Look at page 48 to find out if your home is a safe place to live and how to make it even safer.

Each year, accidents in the home hurt over six and a half million people.

Why *Focus on* Children?

Everyone needs a healthy home. But there are special reasons to think about children:

- Children's bodies are still growing. Their young brains, livers, and other organs are more likely to be harmed by chemicals and other dangers than those of adults. If children get sick, it may be harder for them to get well because their immune systems are still developing.
- For their size, children eat more food, drink more water, and breathe more air than adults do. When they get lead in their bodies or breathe in harmful gases, they get a bigger dose than adults would.
- Children play and crawl on the ground. That means they are closer to many things that might cause health problems, like dust and chemicals. Babies and young children also put most everything in their mouths—things that might have chemicals or lead dust on them.



Children depend on adults to make their homes safe!

How to use this booklet...

This booklet asks questions about your home and how you live in it. By answering them, you can find out if your home is healthy or if you need to make some changes.

There are nine chapters in this booklet. Every chapter gives information about a topic, asks questions about it, and gives you simple Action Steps to protect your children's health. At the end of each chapter, you will find out where to get more help.

It's up to you—**Help Yourself to a Healthy Home!**