

# HEALTHY HOMES



Keeping Homes Healthy  
& Safe for Children

If you do home repairs, this brochure is for you. Contractors, landlords, supers, homeowners, 'do-it-yourselfers', and tenants can do a lot to keep homes healthy and safe for children. By working safely and knowing about possible home health hazards, you can make a big difference – one home at a time.



## Keeping Homes Healthy and Safe for Children

We all want our children to be as healthy as possible. But surprisingly, some health problems for children may start or get worse at home.

Home health hazards may lead to illnesses, such as lead poisoning, asthma, allergies, and chemical poisonings. Some homes may have more than one health hazard.

Use the checklist below and see if these common health hazards exist in the home.

### Checklist

|   | YES                      | NO                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Is there peeling paint in the home?         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Are there any water leaks?                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Are home repairs needed?                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Are chemicals or pesticides used or stored? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 Do people smoke in the home?                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If your answer is "yes" to any of the above, home health and safety hazards may exist.



Home health hazards may lead to serious illnesses, such as lead poisoning, asthma, allergies, and chemical poisonings.

## Things You Can Do

### Regular home maintenance is an important way to reduce home health hazards.

Poorly maintained homes may have a number of home health hazards. For example, water leaks may lead to peeling paint, pest infestation and mold growth. While home improvement projects may reduce home health hazards, improper work practices may make them worse. Learn the many low-cost ways to keep homes healthy and safe.

This booklet tells you why healthy homes are important, what you can do, and how to get help. Call 311 to get more information on keeping homes healthy and safe. Your local hardware or paint store may also have information.

## Home Health Hazards in NYC

### Childhood lead poisoning is a problem in NYC.

Lead paint in housing is the primary source of childhood lead poisoning. Almost 70% of NYC housing was built before 1960 – the year NYC banned lead paint in homes. Older layers of lead paint may still be present in these buildings. In 2002, there were nearly 5,000 NYC children with elevated blood lead levels.

### Asthma affects many New York City children.

Asthma is a leading cause of missed school days and is the most common cause of hospitalization for children 14 years and younger in NYC. Triggers in the home can cause or worsen asthma symptoms.

**Many children are poisoned each year from chemicals in the home.** The NYC Poison Control Center gets thousands of calls about children's exposure to household chemicals and pesticides each year.

**Surveys show that about 1 out of 3 households in NYC report having cockroaches and about 1 out of 4 report mice and rats inside or outside their home.**

## Preventing Lead Poisoning

Lead paint may be a health hazard in older homes. Younger children are most at-risk. Lead can cause learning and behavior problems.

Lead-based paint in good condition is not an immediate problem. However, lead-based paint in poor condition may turn into lead dust and chips. Young children can swallow lead dust through normal hand-to-mouth activity. Before you repaint, repair, or remodel a home, learn about lead-safe work practices and requirements. Lead-safe work practices may help prevent exposure to lead paint dust and debris.

## Checklist

|   | YES                      | NO                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Was the home built before 1960?                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is there peeling, chipping, or damaged paint?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do doors and windows stick together?                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are you planning – or have you recently completed – home repairs? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If your answer is "yes" to any of the above, lead hazards in the home may exist.

### NOTE:

Make sure your doctor tests your child for lead at 1 and 2 years of age. Ask your doctor to test for lead at any age if you think your child has been exposed to lead.



## Things You Can Do

### Tenants with Young Children

Report peeling or damaged paint to your landlord immediately. Call 311 if your problem isn't fixed.

### Homeowners

If you plan on repairing or renovating a home built before 1960, use workers trained in lead-safe work practices. If you plan on doing the work yourself, get training on lead-safe work practices.

### Landlords

For work in buildings where young children live or on turnover, certain legal requirements may apply; such as appropriately trained workers and dust clearance testing when the work is completed. You are also required, among other things, to inspect and safely repair peeling or damaged paint. Always use safe work practices and know legal requirements. Financial assistance may be available through HPD. For more information, call (212) 863-6389.

### Contractors, supers, and repair persons

Plan out any work that may disturb lead paint. Get appropriate training in lead-safe work practices before you begin – and use safe work practices throughout the job. Call HPD at 311 for training in lead-safe work practices.



## Controlling Asthma and Allergies

Common home health hazards can also trigger asthma episodes in individuals who are sensitive to them. Home maintenance and repairs can reduce common asthma triggers.

**Asthma** is a common lung disease among NYC children. During an asthma attack, the airways in the lungs get swollen, the chest feels tight, and the person may cough, wheeze, or have trouble breathing.

**Allergies** are the body's overreaction to common substances. Allergic reactions include sneezing, itching, rashes, swelling, and watery eyes. Many asthma triggers also cause allergies.

### Checklist

|  | YES                      | NO                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Are these asthma triggers present?       |                          |                          |
| Cigarette smoke                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mold                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cockroaches                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dust                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are there moisture problems in the home? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are there places for pests to hide?      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If your answer is "yes" to any of the above, asthma hazards may exist in the home.

### Cigarette Smoke

Smoking is the #1 cause of preventable death in New York City. Secondhand smoke is also dangerous. Babies and children who live or stay with people who smoke are much more likely to have asthma, bronchitis, ear infections, and pneumonia.

### Mold Growth

Mold is a part of nature. But mold growth indoors can be a problem. Mold may cause allergic reactions in some people. Mold may also be an asthma trigger.

Mold can grow on most wet or damp surfaces. It can grow on sheetrock, ceiling tiles, and carpets. The best way to stop mold is to control moisture.

### Cockroaches and Mice

Cockroaches and mice are asthma triggers. Reduce hiding places, clutter, holes, and cracks; and moisture sources. And don't leave food out. See the next section Controlling Pests Safely for more information.

### Dust Mites

Dust mites are tiny insects – too small to see – that live in soft bedding, dust, and carpets. Dust mites are a common allergen and asthma trigger. Reduce dust mites by washing bedding weekly in hot water and reducing dust in bedroom areas.

## Things You Can Do

### Everyone

- Don't allow anyone to smoke in the home. If you need help quitting, call 311.

### Contractors, landlords, supers, and 'do-it-yourselfers'

- Remove mold safely and stop water leaks. Go to [nyc.gov/html/doh/html/ei/eimold.html](http://nyc.gov/html/doh/html/ei/eimold.html) for more information.
- Use safe pest control methods. See the following section Controlling Pests Safely for more information.
- Always clean up carefully at the end of each workday. Use wet mops and wet cloths to clean up dust.
- Install bathroom ventilation to control moisture.

### Tenants

- Wash bedding and soft toys weekly in hot water and minimize dust to control dust mites.
- Keep homes clean to minimize pests and dust mites.



## Controlling Pests Safely

Many chemicals used to kill pests – insects and rodents – can also be harmful to people. Whenever possible, use non-chemical methods for pest control. Also, since pests need food, water and hiding places, the best pest control makes sure these things aren't available to pests.

### Checklist

|  | YES                      | NO                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Are bug sprays or other pesticides used?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Are there any water leaks?                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Is food or garbage left out overnight?                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do pests have hiding places such as cracks, crevices or holes? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If your answer is "yes" to any of the above, home health hazards may exist.

### Things You Can Do

#### Contractors, landlords, supers, and 'do-it-yourselfers'

- Fix leaks and dripping faucets quickly.
- Use caulk and plaster to seal holes and cracks in walls, floors, and ceilings.

#### Tenants/Families

- Do not leave food or garbage out.
- Store food in sealed containers.
- Wash and dry dishes after each use.
- Reduce clutter, newspapers, and cardboard.
- Empty your kitchen garbage every day.

### Everyone

- Use safer pest control products: avoid foggers, bombs and sprays.
- Always store chemicals safely and out of children's reach.
- Never use products called "Tempo", "Tres Pasitos" or "Roach Chalk".

### Roach Control

Very lightly apply boric acid with a bulb duster or plastic squeeze bottle where roaches are active.

Use behind cabinets, under refrigerators, and in cracks and crevices before you seal them.

#### and

Place cockroach bait stations or apply small pea-sized dabs of cockroach gel bait in areas of high activity.

### Rodent Control

Use mouse glue traps. If you choose poison pellets, use brands that come in enclosures, and follow instructions.



## Using Household Products Safely

Common household products may contain harmful chemicals. Examples include drain and oven cleaners, bug sprays, bleach and ammonia. Accidental swallowing or improper use can cause severe illness and even death.

### Checklist

|   | YES                      | NO                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Do any labels on containers say "DANGER" or "POISON"? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Are products used improperly?                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Are chemicals stored within reach of children?        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If your answer is "yes" to any of the above, poison hazards in the home may exist.

### Things You Can Do

- **Read the Label** Product labels often contain a signal word, such as DANGER, POISON, WARNING, or CAUTION. Products labeled DANGER or POISON are the most hazardous. Pay attention to other messages on the label such as "causes burns on contact", "vapors harmful", or "extremely flammable." Learn to recognize these phrases and take them seriously.
- **Follow product instructions.**
- **Store chemicals in cabinets with childproof locks.**
- **Use products only for their intended purpose.**
- **Avoid using aerosol spray products.**
- **Never mix household products unless directed by the label.** Never mix ammonia and bleach.
- **Choose safer products.** Read and compare labels.
- **Keep products in original, labeled containers.** Never put in food or drink containers.

- **Less is better.** Use and purchase only what you need.
- **Do not use products that contain methylene chloride.**

## Keeping Homes Safe

Safety hazards can be serious problems in homes. Injuries – inside and outside the home – are one of the leading causes of death of NYC children.

### Checklist

|  | YES                      | NO                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Are any windows without window guards?                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Are smoke detectors missing or not working?                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Do furnaces and other heaters go without an annual inspection? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Is a carbon monoxide detector absent?                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 Is the home not "childproof"?                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If your answer is "yes" to any of the above, safety hazards in the home may exist.

### Things You Can Do

#### Contractors, landlords, supers, and 'do-it-yourselfers'

- Make sure window guards are installed where children under the age of 11 live.
- Landlords are required by law to install window guards.**



- Install smoke detectors in the home, particularly outside of each bedroom or sleeping area in the home. **Landlords of multiple dwelling apartment buildings are required by law to install at least one smoke detector in each apartment.**
- Make sure all furnaces, space heaters, and gas appliances are vented properly and inspected each year. Homes should be equipped with at least one carbon monoxide alarm.
- Do not buy mercury-containing items such as thermostats. To discard mercury-containing items, call 311 for information.

#### Tenants/Families

- **Childproof Your Home**
  - Use safety plugs to cover electrical outlets.
  - Use safety latches for drawers and cabinets.
  - Store all hazardous products in locked cabinets.
  - Do not buy mercury-containing items such as thermometers. To discard mercury-containing items, call 311 for information.
- Test smoke detectors at least once a month and change batteries every spring and fall when you change your clocks.
- Keep a fire extinguisher in the home.

### Making Homes Smoke-Free

Be Tobacco-Free – especially in the home. Smoking is the #1 cause of preventable death in NYC, killing 10,000 New Yorkers every year. Secondhand smoke is also dangerous. It causes cancer, heart disease, and many other illnesses. Babies and children who live or stay with people who smoke are much more likely to have asthma, bronchitis, ear infections, and pneumonia. Lit cigarettes are also a serious fire hazard. If you smoke, get help quitting.

To avoid serious health problems:

#### Be Tobacco-Free!

### For More Information

- New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)
- New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development [nyc.gov/hpd](http://nyc.gov/hpd)
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control [www.hud.gov/offices/lead/index.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/lead/index.cfm) for general Healthy Homes information. [www.hud.gov/healthy/safehome.html](http://www.hud.gov/healthy/safehome.html) for home safety hazards.



## For More Information

Call the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in NYC. Call 311 or go to [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)



[nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)



Healthy Homes:  
A Key Step to a  
Healthier New York



[nyc.gov/hpd](http://nyc.gov/hpd)