



Healthy Homes Priorities for Homeowners NeighborWorks Chicago August 2009

Prepared by the National Center for Healthy Housing

www.nchh.org

Most of us spend the majority of our day in our home. We sleep there, eat there, and spend time in our home. Ensuring our home is healthy makes good sense. **Healthy homes are dry, pest-free, contaminate-free, ventilated, clean, safe, and maintained.**

The maintenance tasks discussed in this class help to create and maintain a healthy home. To supplement the common maintenance and behavioral recommendations in this course, we suggest 10 healthy homes priority actions.

1. Follow Good Cleaning and Housekeeping Strategies

- Do regular cleaning with HEPA vacuums with beater bar for carpets.
- Products: Minimize use of harsh products. Simple soap and water, vinegar and water work well. For green-certified products, look for GreenSeal, Ecologo, or Dfe certified products.
- Use walk-off mats to remove dirt and contaminants on shoes before entering.
- **Health benefits:** Reduces asthma triggers (dust mites, allergens), removes contaminants on shoes, cleans up lead dust in older homes.

2. Prevent Moisture and Mold Problems

- Pay attention to leaks – solve the problem.
- Notice water problems from rainstorms or snow – solve issues.
- Don't just clean up mold – figure out why it is happening and fix the water problem.
- Products: Avoid overuse of bleach to clean up mold, it doesn't eliminate the water problem and is caustic. Soap and water are effective.
- **Health benefits:** Reduces asthma triggers and moist conditions that can create breathing issues, reduces pest habitat, reduces likelihood of peeling lead-based paint.

3. Minimize Pest Problems

- Don't invite pest into your home in or tolerate them (cockroaches, mice, rats).
- Use good housekeeping to clean up food and clutter that pests like.
- Minimize moisture that pests need.
- If you see evidence of pests, figure out how the pest is getting in the home and stop entry.
- Products: No foggers, no sprays for consumers; use:
 - Cockroaches –bait and gels
 - Mice – snap traps and seal holes
 - Rats – call professional
- **Health benefits:** Reduces allergens from pests, minimizes need for pesticides.

4. Ventilate

- Use your fans – bath and kitchen, make sure they exhaust to outside.
- Filter air for forced hot air systems – MERV 10.
- **Health benefits:** Reduces moisture/mold that can trigger asthma and breathing issues, filters allergens and contaminants.

5. Avoid Contaminants

- Smoke outside – your family and visitors.
- Room air cleaners – avoid those that produce ozone or say they ionize.
- Air fresheners – they are unnecessary, they don't clean the air and can mask smells or create breathing irritation.
- Green flooring – use Green Label Plus carpet with reduced VOCs.
- **Health benefits:** Reduces risks from cancer, SIDS, and heart issues linked to tobacco smoke, reduces allergens and contaminants when filtering air, reduces VOCs linked to breathing issues.

6. Don't Disturb Old Paint that May Create Lead Dust Hazards

- Lead testing determines whether paint is lead-based, or assume any pre-1978 painted home has lead-based paint.
- Follow lead-safe work practices during repair or repainting to control, contain, and clean up lead dust.
- Products: Use low-VOC paint for interior surfaces (e.g., GreenSeal; LEED-compliant).
- **Health benefits:** Reduces lead poisoning (learning difficulties, hypertension, neurological impairment, etc.).

7. Be Careful When Repairing or Renovating Insulation

- Insulation on pipes and vermiculite attic insulation can contain asbestos.
- **Health benefits:** Reduces risks for lung cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis.

8. Let Your Home Tell You When a Health Risk Exists

- Install carbon monoxide (CO) alarms outside sleeping areas on each floor.
- Install smoke alarms on all floors and near fire risks.
- Test for radon in zones 1 and 2, consider in all homes.
- **Health benefits:** Reduces risk of death from CO poisoning or lower-level health effects, reduces risk of injury or death from fires, and reduces lung cancer if radon-resistant construction is used.

9. Make the Home Energy Efficient

- Contact the state weatherization office to find your local provider. Weatherization programs conduct audits and energy conservation measures for lower-income owners (see list for contact details).
- **Health benefits:** Reduces contaminants if carbon monoxide issues are addressed, improves comfort, may improve respiratory health, and can reduce pest problems and allergens.

10. Incorporate Healthy Homes Strategies into Renovation Projects

- Address existing and prevent future problems while performing work safely.
- **Health benefits:** Reduces many health risks during and after the completion of the project.

For more information on healthy homes, go to www.nchh.org

For more information on energy efficiency and weatherization programs, go to:

- Department of Energy Weatherization Assistance Program: listing of state weatherization programs: http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/weatherization/state_contacts.cfm
- Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Energy Efficiency: listing by state of energy efficiency programs: www.dsireusa.org