

How to avoid environmental allergens

What are environmental allergens?

An allergen is something that can cause an allergic reaction. Common environmental allergens include:

- Mold
- Pollen
- Dust mites
- Pets
- Cockroaches

What is an allergy?

Allergies happen when the immune system reacts to a foreign, protein-like substance. Every time your child is exposed to that same substance (or allergen), it triggers histamine and other chemicals to be released in the body. This may cause symptoms in the eyes, nose, ears, lungs and skin.

How can I control allergy symptoms?

There are 3 ways to control allergy symptoms:

1. Reduce sources of allergens in your home.
2. Give your child medicines as prescribed by their doctor. This may include antihistamines and corticosteroid/antihistamine nasal sprays.
3. Have your child get immunotherapy (allergy shots) as advised by their doctor. Immunotherapy is a type of treatment that makes you less allergic to allergens.

School and work

Your child may need to take special precautions at school or work if they have allergies to dusts, molds and animals. Talk with the care team for more details.

Air pollution and irritants

Pollution, smoke, chemicals and perfumes are not allergens, but they may still cause eye, nose and breathing symptoms if your child's nasal allergies and/or asthma are not well-controlled.

- Do not smoke. Avoid areas where others are smoking.
- Avoid common household cleaners that can irritate the airways. Try using unscented cleaners instead.
- Avoid soaps that smell, perfumes, aerosol sprays and chalk dusts.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

How to avoid environmental allergens, continued

How can my child avoid environmental allergens?

How to avoid mold

Mold is a fungus that can be found indoors and outdoors. Mold likes to grow in warm, damp places.

To help your child avoid **indoor** mold:

- Clean mold off of surfaces in your house with diluted bleach.
- Fix parts of your house that have water damage.
- Avoid using humidifiers.
- Use a dehumidifier to help lower the humidity (moisture in the air) in your house.

To help your child avoid **outdoor** mold:

- Avoid walking through grass that has just been cut.
- Avoid walking through uncut fields of grass.
- Avoid playing near compost or dry dirt.
- Avoid raking or playing in leaves.
- Use air conditioning.
- Keep doors and windows to your house closed.
- Avoid window and attic fans that pull in outside air.

How to avoid pollen

Your child may have an allergy to tree, grass or weed pollen. An allergy to pollen does not mean that your child is also allergic to other parts of the plant (like grass leaves or tree nuts).

The amount of pollen, or pollen count, in the air and environment changes. Different pollens have higher counts at different times of the year.

- Tree pollens are higher in the winter and spring.
- Grass pollens are higher in the summer.
- Weed pollens are higher in the fall.

To help your child avoid pollen:

- Keep doors and windows closed at home.
- Wash your child's hands and face with soap and water when they come inside.
- Avoid keeping dirty clothes that have been outside in your child's bedroom.
- Avoid hanging clothes, sheets and towels outside to dry.
- Pollen is the worst from 5 a.m. to 10 a.m. in the morning. Avoid spending time outside during these hours on days with high pollen counts. To find pollen counts in your area, visit pollen.aaaai.org.

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How to avoid environmental allergens, continued

How to avoid dust mites

Dust mites are tiny bugs that are too small to see. It is common for dust mites to live in dust found in your house. Every house has dust mites.

To help your child avoid dust mites:

- Wash your child's sheets at least once a week in hot water.
- Cover your child's pillows, mattress and box spring with dust mite covers.
- Have as little carpeting as possible. Vacuum your carpet at least once a week.
- Avoid using humidifiers.
- Avoid using ceiling fans.
- Your child should avoid sleeping with stuffed animals in their bed. If your child must sleep with a stuffed animal, let them choose 1 stuffed animal. Wash the stuffed animal at least once a week hot water.

How to avoid pets

Your pet is not hypoallergenic (free from causing allergies) if it has fur or feathers. If your child is allergic to your pet, you may need to find a new home for your pet.

To help your child avoid pet allergies:

- Keep your pet outdoors.
- Keep your pet in a part of the house that is not used much.
- Close the door to your child's bedroom to keep your pet out of their room.
- Wash your child's clothes and have your child shower after they have played with a pet.
- An air purifier with HEPA filter may help decrease the amount of pet allergen in a room.

How to avoid cockroaches and rodents

Cockroaches (roaches) are a type of bug that can be found in houses. Rodents like mice and rats can be found in houses, too.

To help your child avoid cockroach allergies:

- Use baits to kill roaches.
- Call a professional to use baits to kill roaches.
- Avoid puddles of water in your house.
- Fix any water leaks in your house.
- Store food in closed containers.
- Avoid leaving dirty dishes in your sink.
- Take your trash outside.

To help your child avoid rodent allergies, call a professional if you find rodents in your house.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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