

# Controlling Allergens In Your Child's Environment

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As a parent or caregiver of a child or adolescent with allergies and/or asthma, you have the ability to help reduce the severity of, or even prevent your child's symptoms by modifying the environment that surrounds your child. Please complete the following checklist of environmental controls:

- Do not allow tobacco smoke around your child in the house, car, or at daycare. This is perhaps the most important thing that you can do to help prevent symptoms of allergies and asthma.
- If you do smoke, do so outside, wearing a shirt or jacket that can be taken off at the door. Encourage any smoking visitors to do the same.
  
- Thoroughly dust the entire house with a damp cloth weekly, especially your child's bedroom.
- Vacuum the house weekly, keeping your child out of the vacuumed room for at least 1 hour. It is preferable to use a vacuum cleaner containing a HEPA filter. Change your vacuum bag regularly.
- Avoid using chemical cleaners that leave a lingering smell
  
- Encase your child's mattress and pillow with an allergen-proof nylon or vinyl casing. These are easily and inexpensively available at most major retailers.
- Do not use down/feather pillows or comforters in your child's bedroom. Avoid wool bedding.
- Wash all of your child's bed linens weekly in hot water to kill dust mites. Do not dry the linens outside.
- Remove all dust-catchers from your child's bedroom (carpeting, draperies, stuffed animals). If not possible to remove them, then limit the number of stuffed animals to one or two.
- Consider adding air-cleaning houseplants to your child's room (such as philodendrons, or spider-plants)
- Consider purchasing a HEPA air filter device for your child's bedroom if dust is still significant
  
- Reduce indoor humidity to less than 50% during the wet months, if your home seems always moist, by using a dehumidifier. Do not use a humidifier, which increases mold growth.
- Clean all mold-prone surfaces (bathroom tiles, windowsills) weekly with a bleach solution
  
- During outdoor allergen season (Early Spring: trees, Late Spring: grasses, Summer: occasionally weeds, Fall: molds), keep your child's bedroom window closed. Remember that tree pollens peak between 4-10 a.m., and grasses between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.)
- During these seasons, have your child change clothing and take a shower when he/she comes in for the day. If your child is allergic to grass, restrict their outdoor play between 10 and 4:00
  
- Do not allow furry or feathered friends to be inside the child's room, especially cats. Indoor pets should be bathed regularly. If indoor pets, vacuum carpeting twice weekly, and dry mop all other flooring types frequently. Keep pets off furniture.
  
- If possible, do not use a wood-burning stove, kerosene or oil heater, or wood-burning fireplace.
- Minimize your child's exposure to strong odors, such as paints, talcum powder, perfume, sawdust, air freshener sprays, and hairspray. Parents should change clothes prior to returning from work if they work around any strong smelling chemicals or paints or other toxic substances.

Other things to remember for children with allergies and asthma:

- Be sure the child receives an annual flu shot (in October or early November)
- Consider a daily multivitamin, or vitamin C supplement
- Be sure your child warms up for at least 10 minutes before exercise
- Avoid sulfite preservatives
- Avoid direct cold air (have the child use a scarf in the winter to cover their mouth)
- Avoid aspirin
- Avoid laundering your child's clothing or bedding with detergents containing perfumes.  
Avoid perfumed fabric softeners.
- For any furniture used by the child, especially in their bedroom, consider wood, or leather.  
Upholstered furniture harbors high amounts of dust mites.
- Replace your furnace filter monthly, or purchase a permanent filter (which must still be cleaned monthly using a garden hose)
- Let your child be a child! Don't restrict their activity unless they are experiencing sign of difficulty breathing.