



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

Desensitizing Your Child's Environment

Dust is the most common year round allergy. The allergy is caused by little microscopic animals called dust mites that live in house dust. The best way to prevent allergy symptoms from house dust is to remove as much dust as you can from your home. Be sure to pay special attention to the bedroom where your child spends much of his/her time. This following list of ideas will help you make your child's room less likely to cause an attack by "desensitizing" the room. The main sources of house dust are stuffed furniture, mattresses, box spring, pillows, rugs, stuffed toys, "Down" feathers, animal hair, and unfiltered furnace air.

Cleaning:

Keep your child out of the room while dusting and for one hour after dusting; this allows the dust in the air to settle back down. Try to do the first big cleaning and any major cleaning while your child is away.

1. Remove all furniture from the room.
2. Wet mop and wet dust the room from top to bottom: this includes lights, closets, window sills, shelves, and molding.
3. Damp mopping should be done with a cleaning liquid that contains a disinfectant to prevent the growth of mold spores.
4. Clean all furniture well before it is put back into the room.
5. If you can, wet mop and dust once a day.

Furnishings

- **BED:** Every bed in your child's room should have wooden or metal frames. Do not use a couch, sofa, or hide-a-bed. If your child sleeps in a bunk bed, he/she should sleep in the top bunk.
- **MATTRESS:** Place the mattress in dust proof cover which has a zipper. Tape over the zipper (electrical or duct tape). If a box spring is used, it must have a zippered cover also. If there are other beds in the room, place the mattress and box springs in dust proof covers as well.
- **PILLOWS:** Pillows should be made of Dacron or other synthetic fiber. Do not use Kapok, foam, feather, or "Down" pillows. Encase pillows in zippered dust-proof covers.
- **BLANKETS:** Do not use comforters or quilts on the bed. Use only cotton, rayon, or synthetic fiber blankets. Older children who can safely use an electric blanket may use one.
- **FLOOR COVERINGS:** If possible, remove wall-to-wall carpeting. If not, vacuum the carpet frequently (at least twice a week). Only vacuum when your child is away and will not return to the room for several hours after you have finished. Substitute multi-layered vacuum bags for regular singer layer bags. Small, washable cotton rugs may be used if washed often. If you use a rug pad, be sure it is made of rubber. Wood or tile flooring with no rug is best.
- **CLOSET:** Remove all stored toys, boxes, and other articles from the closet. The closet should contain only your child's clothing and should be as dust-free as the room. Keep all clothes in closets, never lying around the room.

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- **FURNACE (HEATING):** Electric or gas heat is recommended. Do not use wood stoves or kerosene heaters. Change the air filters on the furnace every month. Cover all furnace outlets in the room with ten thicknesses of cheesecloth or muslin. This will catch dust in the furnace air. Change the cheesecloth when it gets dusty underneath (about every two weeks).
- **AIR CONDITIONERS:** Window unit or central air-conditioning is ideal. Electric fans or ceiling fans should not be used. Windows should be kept closed, especially in the summer.
- **DOORS:** Bedroom closet door and bedroom door must remain closed as much as possible.
- **WALLS:** Paint walls or use washable wallpaper. No pennants, pictures, or dust catchers on the walls.
- **WINDOW COVERINGS:** Washable roll-up cotton or synthetic window shades are ideal. If using curtains, they should be laundered monthly in hot water. Use washable cotton or fiberglass curtains instead of drapes. Venetian blinds or mini blinds should be dusted weekly.

Other Important Tips:

- **SLEEPING AND NAPPING:** Your child should nap or sleep only in his/her own bed, which has been made dust free. When your child travels or visits, he/she should take their non-allergic pillow with him/her.
- **OTHER ROOMS:** If your child plays in a room other than his/her bedroom, it also must be as dust-free as possible.
- **PLAYING:** Do not allow your child to jump on furniture or beds nor to wrestle or carpeted floor. Your child's bedroom should not be used as a playroom.
- **PETS:** Pets that have fur or feathers often cause allergy troubles. If your child is allergic to animal dander, it is best not to have pets and not to visit homes where these types of pets are kept. If your child must have a pet, "hairless" pets such as fish or hermit crabs are okay.
- **CLEANING:** Avoid dusting, vacuuming, or cleaning fireplaces and furnaces when your child is around.
- **CHALK DUST:** Your child should avoid chalk dust.
- **DUSTY OBJECTS:** Your child should not handle objects that have dust on them: such as, books, boxes, or clothing if they have been stored in shelves or cupboards for long periods of time. Clothes and shoes should be brushed before storing in your child's room.
- **ATTICS, CLOSETS, BASEMENTS:** Your child should stay away from attics, closets, and basements.
- **ODOROUS PRODUCTS:** Your child should avoid things that smell strong: such as, perfumes, hair spray, mothballs, tar, wet paint, gasoline, insect sprays, and room deodorizers.
- **SMOKING:** Do not allow family and friends to smoke anywhere inside the house.
- **MICELLANEOUS:** Remove all upholstered (stuffed) furniture, pillows, blinds, window drapes, and dust-catching items from your child's bedroom. Replace upholstered furniture with wooden or plastic furniture. No open bookshelves — they are great dust catchers. No perfumes, talc, make-up, or flowers. No fabric toys or stuffed animals. Toy should be wooden, plastic, or metal. Store toys in a closed toy chest, in another room. If your child has stuffed animals they should be machine washable and washed in hot water.

The Family Car:

The family car is also a source of dust. Follow these guidelines to make it a healthy place for your child.

1. Before winter, turn on the car's heater (with the car doors open) for 20 minutes to clean out the heating system. Vacuum the heating outlets. When vacuuming, keep the vacuum cleaner outside the car.

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2. Wash and vacuum the inside of the car often.
3. Wash the car floor mats with a disinfectant. Dry well.
4. Use only Dacron pillows in the car.
5. Do not allow smoking in the car any time. Smoke is very irritating in an enclosed area and its odor may be trapped in the car's upholstery for a long period of time and continue to trigger symptoms.
6. Vinyl seat covers help keep dust and mold from forming inside upholstery in the car.
7. Keep car windows rolled up. Use the air-conditioner.