



7 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT INDOOR AIR SAFETY

- 1 Ventilate your house.** One of the easiest ways to improve air quality is proper ventilation. This removes stale indoor air, reduces the amount of air pollutants and helps control moisture. You can improve ventilation in your home by opening windows and doors and using kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans.
- 2 Almost 60 percent of First Nations adults are smokers.** Cigarette and tobacco smoke is a health hazard. Smoking and second-hand smoke can cause lung cancer. Kids exposed to smoke are more likely to get upper respiratory infections, middle ear infections and pneumonia. Smoke also worsens asthma. Smoke can get trapped in hair, skin, fabrics, carpets, furniture and even toys. Each time a cigarette is lit, more smoke gets trapped. Eventually this trapped smoke gets into people's bodies. To improve air quality, do not smoke in your house or car. Get help to quit smoking by talking to your nurse or doctor.
- 3 Over 40 percent of homes on reserves need major repairs, and mould is a common problem.** Mould is a fungus that grows on food or damp materials. Mould can be black, white or coloured. As mould grows, it releases spores into the air that can affect your health in a variety of bad ways: eye, nose and throat irritation; wheezing and shortness of breath; allergic reactions; and worsening symptoms of asthma. The key to preventing mould is to reduce indoor moisture. For instance, you should turn on fans to vent water vapour from your shower, and you should throw out wet materials that could grow mould, such as wet cardboard, paper or fabric. If you discover mould, clean the surface with soapy water and dry the surface completely. If the mould covers areas larger than one square metre, consider getting help from your health centre or an environmental health officer.
- 4 Radon is a gas that has no smell, colour or taste.** It is produced by the breakdown of uranium in soil, rock and water. Radon gas can accumulate in poorly

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ventilated spaces such as basements. Low levels of radon are not a health concern, but long-term exposure to high levels can increase the risk of lung cancer. Less than 3 percent of Canadian homes off-reserve have high levels of radon gas. Health Canada is currently working with First Nations communities to determine the levels of radon gas in homes on reserve.

- 5 Carbon monoxide (CO) is a deadly gas that has no smell, colour or taste.** It can come from unvented kerosene and gas space heaters; gas water heaters; wood stoves and fireplaces; charcoal burners; gas stoves; and exhaust from generators and other gasoline-powered equipment such as cars, trucks and snowmobiles. Low levels of CO exposure can give you a headache and make you feel tired. At high levels, CO can cause death. To prevent CO exposure, always ensure that your home is well ventilated. Do not start vehicles or other gasoline-powered equipment in enclosed spaces such as your garage. Consider buying and installing a CO detector from your local hardware store.

- 6 Lead dust can be released into the air from old paint on walls or furniture, and it can harm the developing brains and nervous systems of children and unborn babies.** Lead was often added to paint made before 1960. Between 1960 and 1990, small amounts of lead were sometimes used in paint. Lead paint is usually not a problem if it is not flaking, peeling or blistering. To check if the paint on your walls or furniture contains lead, you can obtain a lead paint test kit at most major hardware stores. If you suspect you have a problem, get help from your health centre or an environmental health officer.

- 7 Dust and dust mites can cause allergic reactions and worsen the symptoms of asthma.** Dust mites are microscopic creatures that live in beds, carpets, furniture, pillows, and blankets. To reduce dust and dust mites, vacuum your carpets and any fabric-covered furniture. Vacuum your mattress regularly and wash sheets once a week in hot water. To reduce your exposure to pet dander (a source of dust); keep dogs and cats out of your bedroom and off your furniture.



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National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)
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FIRST NATIONS CENTRE
220 Laurier Ave. W.
Suite 1200
Ottawa, ON K1P 5Z9

Phone: 613.237.9462
Toll Free: 877.602.4445
Fax: 613.237.1810
Email: fnc@naho.ca

→ www.naho.ca/firstnations