

ALERT

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AIR POLLUTION - INDOORS!

by Elliot Levinsohn



Winter is here, and research shows people spend about 90 percent of their time indoors when it gets cold outdoors. But few realize that indoor air can be more seriously polluted than outdoor air, in even the largest cities. Children, the elderly and those with chronic illnesses, who may be exposed to indoor air pollutants for the longest periods of time, are even more likely to suffer from the effects of indoor air pollution.

Health effects from indoor air pollutants may be felt soon after exposure or even years later. Symptoms include irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat, headaches, dizziness, and fatigue. Asthma symptoms, like wheezing and coughing, may also appear soon after exposure to some indoor air pollutants. If symptoms occur at home and seem to clear up when away from home for hours or days, there may be a problem with your indoor air.

There are many possible sources of indoor air pollution in any home. Some of the more common pollution sources release through combustion: wood-burning stoves, fireplaces, unvented kerosene and gas space heaters and gas stoves. Building materials, furnishings and household products can release pollutants continuously. Other sources, such as tobacco smoke and solvents used in cleaning and hobby activities, release pollutants off and on. High levels of pollution can remain in the air and continue to pose a health threat for long periods after some of these activities have stopped.

How a home is built can also add to the problem. Modern and remodeled homes are made "tight" to save on energy costs. But if too little outdoor air enters a home, pollutants can build up to levels that can pose health and comfort problems. Apartments can have the same problems as single-family homes, and may have additional sources such as contaminated ventilation systems, improperly placed outdoor air intakes or unsafe maintenance activities.

It is wise to identify possible sources of indoor air pollution even if symptoms are not noticeable. Experts advise that source control, not air cleaners, is the most effective solution for air quality problems. Use flues and exhaust fans vented to the outside when using fireplaces and wood stoves, and follow directions carefully when using kerosene or gas space heaters. Keep windows and doors slightly opened when using non-vented space heaters, and as often as weather permits. Work with solvents outside or in well-ventilated areas. Buy pressed wood products labeled "exterior grade" to decrease formaldehyde exposure.

The Environmental Protection Agency has many resources for people interested in air quality; visit www.epa.gov and click on "Air" for more information. If needed, call an air quality professional to test for indoor air pollution- look under air quality in a local phone book to find one.



Discuss any health symptoms with a doctor, get sources of indoor air pollution resolved, and breathe easier this winter. ❄️

Elliot Levinsohn is a Certified Indoor Environmentalist, Indoor Environments Project Manager with Protech Environmental Services, Ann Arbor

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- ❄️ 8.8% of Michigan adults had current asthma in 2002
- ❄️ 53.6% of adults with asthma had an asthma attack in the last year
- ❄️ 36.8% of adults with asthma had had a flu shot in the past year. This rate is higher than that for all adults (27.8%)

Source: The Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, 2002.

ASTHMA COALITION COLUMN



Focus on: Kalamazoo Area Asthma Coalition

One of 14 independent asthma coalitions in Michigan, the Kalamazoo Area Asthma Coalition (KAAC) works to enhance the quality of life for people with asthma, and has been focusing their efforts in local schools.

In its second year, the KAAC Kids School Intervention Program involves asthma training for children in grades 2-4 who have either been diagnosed with asthma or who have asthma symptoms. Sessions last about 30 minutes, with worksheets that go home to parents so they can help reinforce new asthma management skills. Over 70 students have participated in the program, and teachers, administrators, and secretaries also received instruction. Surveys at the end of the program showed increased asthma knowledge in all groups.

"The coalition has leveraged more than \$180,000 in grant funds to help teach students, educators and family members about asthma," said Dr. Douglas Homnick, co-chair of the KAAC. "We plan to expand the program into 3 or 4 more schools this year and have been very happy with the results."

The KAAC recently completed a study to find the baseline number of asthma-related visits to the Emergency Department (ED), and to help develop a uniform ED treatment protocol. Coupled with the school project, the goal of the new protocol is to reduce preventable visits to the ED and to decrease absenteeism in schools and workplaces.

Want to find out more about Kalamazoo Area Asthma Coalition? Need to find an asthma coalition near you? Visit www.GetAsthmaHelp.org and click on Coalitions. ❄️

Please direct questions and comments about this newsletter to:

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c/o American Lung Assoc. of Michigan
403 Seymour Avenue
Lansing, MI 48933-1179
phone: 1-866-395-8647
e-mail: info@GetAsthmaHelp.org

WINTER ASTHMA TIP

If you or your child come down with a cold this winter, check with your doctor before using any over-the-counter cold medications. These medications may trigger an adverse reaction and upset the success of your/your child's current asthma treatment program. For body aches, try acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) since studies show it's less likely to worsen asthma than aspirin or any other NSAID. ❄️



ASTHMA EDUCATOR UPDATE

The National Asthma Educator Certification Board has added an asthma coding, billing, and reimbursement section to their website. Many healthcare providers are not aware that asthma education is reimbursable, and the complexity in coding and billing can be overwhelming. Visit www.naecb.org/cbr/ to find out what's reimbursed for asthma care by Medicaid in Michigan, and related billing codes. ❄️

Visit
www.GetAsthmaHelp.org
for more information about asthma events
& trainings in your area.

MI ASTHMA CALENDAR

January

- 15 **Open Airways for Schools Facilitator Training**, University Lutheran Church, East Lansing, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., \$100 For more info: 248-784-2022

February

- 7 **Asthma Education Conference**, Fetzer Center, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more info: 269-387-4174
20 **Asthma Information Review (AIR) course**, Foote Hospital, Jackson, 7:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more info: 734-677-6772

March

- 11 **Asthma Management Seminar**, for nurses and allied health pros, Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center, East Lansing, 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. For more info: 517-484-4541