



Breathe Easy!

Now that school is in full swing, parents and students alike are settling into the rhythm of class schedules, homework, after-school activities, and weekend sporting events. But for many children, allergies and asthma stand to get in the way of having a fun, productive school year.

Sniffing Out the Problem

Allergic rhinitis (also called “hay fever”) is caused by an aggressive immune system response to everyday substances that are normally harmless. It affects 40 million Americans, causing symptoms such as a stuffy, runny, or itchy nose; sneezing; coughing; and itchy or watery eyes.

Asthma is a breathing problem affecting nearly 5 million children in the United States. It is caused by a swelling of the airways, which leads to coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, and chest pain or tightness.

If uncontrolled, these conditions can limit the activities a child can participate in, as well as her ability to feel well and be alert in school. They can even cause a life-threatening reaction that requires emergency treatment.

Allergies and asthma are often triggered by the same allergens and irritants, including:

- Dust (contains dust mites and particles of other allergens)
- Pollen (trees, grasses, weeds)
- Fungi (including molds too small to be seen with the naked eye)
- Dander (from furry animals such as cats, dogs and other pets)
- Latex (rubber gloves, toys, balloons)
- Food (cow’s milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, and fish)
- Cockroaches
- Smoke (wood fires, tobacco)
- Colds and sinus infections
- Odors

Limiting your child’s exposure to these allergens can help reduce and may even prevent allergic reactions and asthma attacks.

Clear the air

While you can’t make your child’s world 100 percent allergen-free, you can help her identify and avoid the triggers that cause her to feel sick. The following tips may help:

- 1. Do not smoke or let anyone else smoke in your home or car.**
- 2. Reduce exposure to dust mites through frequent laundering of bedding, frequent vacuuming and dusting of carpets and upholstered furniture, and the use of special allergy-proof casings for mattresses and pillows.**
- 3. Remove carpeting from bedrooms. Damp-mop floors instead of sweeping with a broom, which can send allergens flying into the air.**
- 4. Avoid keeping animals in the house. If you must, then wash pets often and keep them out of your child’s bedroom.**
- 5. Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to clean the air in your child’s bedroom.**
- 6. Control indoor humidity and mold by using exhaust fans in the bathrooms and kitchen and adding a dehumidifier in areas with naturally high humidity, such as basements.**
- 7. Reduce pollen exposure by using an air conditioner, vent closed, in your child’s bedroom. Leave windows and doors closed during high pollen season.**
- 8. Reduce indoor irritants by using unscented cleaning products and avoiding mothballs, room deodorizers and scented candles.**



If properly controlled, asthma and allergies should not interfere with your child’s activities, school, or life.

For more information on allergies and asthma, visit the section on Allergy and Immunology at the AAP’s Web site at www.aap.org/sections/allergy. ●