



# CLEAN AIR AT HOME

Small steps make  
a **big** difference

**PUBLIC HEALTH**

1-800-361-5653

TTY 1-866-252-9933

[york.ca/indoorair](http://york.ca/indoorair)

  
**York Region**

# Clean the air at home for kids.

## Small steps make a **big** difference!

As parents, we do our best to create a healthy home for our children. One of the most important things we can do is clean the air they breathe.

Did you know there are harmful pollutants that you may not see or smell in the air at home? Mould, dust, smoke and fumes from cleaning products are just a few examples.

Pollutants can get into the air when we cook, clean, shower and use products like hairspray. They can also come from household items like carpets, furniture, paint and glue.

### Bad air at home can make children sick.

Breathing these types of pollutants can harm everyone's health. Children are at greater risk of getting sick because their bodies are not fully developed and they breathe in more air than adults. They also put their hands in their mouths more often.

Pollutants can bother children's eyes, nose and throat and cause allergies and breathing problems like asthma. Over time, these pollutants can build up in children's bodies.

### Small steps make a **big** difference.

The good news is that everyone has the power to clean their air at home. There are simple, low-cost steps you can take to immediately start cleaning your air.

#### THIS GUIDE PROVIDES TIPS TO:

1. Control moisture, clean mould
2. Get rid of dust
3. Let bad air out, fresh air in
4. Reduce the use of toxic cleaning products
5. Keep smoke out

#### Tip

*Pregnant women should also take steps to improve their air and protect their unborn children.*



## Step 1:

# Control moisture, clean mould

**Mould can cause serious health problems for children.**  
Keep all surfaces at home as clean and dry as possible.

Mould can grow in the home when there is too much moisture from things such as showering, cooking, flooding and leaks. It can grow on fabric, drywall, cardboard or anything that can hold moisture.

### Take these steps to control moisture:

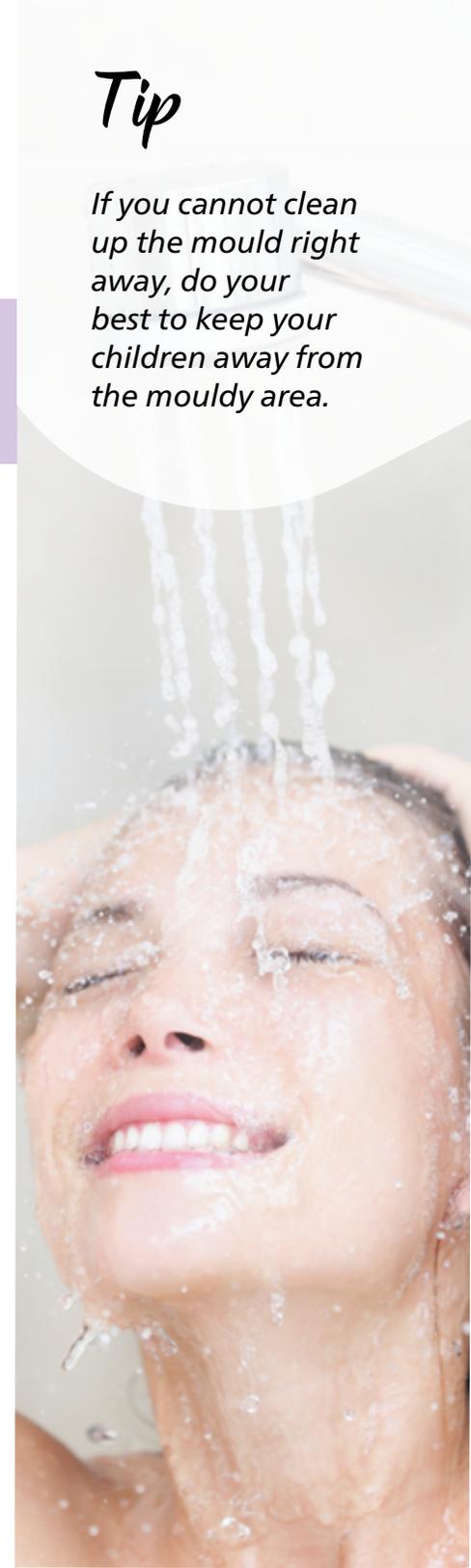
- ✔ Turn on the fan or open a window before you shower and for a few minutes after
- ✔ Turn on the fan or open a window when cooking on the stove
- ✔ Wipe water droplets off bathroom tiles, windows and other surfaces
- ✔ Clean up floods and leaks immediately and dry the area completely. Throw away items that cannot be fully dried
- ✔ Remove clutter in your home
- ✔ Make sure the air vent at the back of your clothes dryer is connected to the outside

### Take these steps to clean mould:

- ✔ Scrub small areas of mould with water and mild detergent as soon as you see them. Dry the area quickly and completely
- ✔ If you have mould that is bigger than one square metre, discuss how to fix the problem with a professional or your property manager if you are a tenant

## Tip

*If you cannot clean up the mould right away, do your best to keep your children away from the mouldy area.*



## Step 2: Get rid of dust



**Did you know that dust is one of the main sources of children's exposure to harmful pollutants at home?**

Children explore the world by crawling, touching and putting things in their mouths. Dust is made up of more than dirt, it can include a mix of toxic chemicals, pollen, pet dander, allergens, dust mites and other pollutants. When children breathe in dust, it gets into their lungs and can harm their health.

### **Take these steps to get rid of dust:**

- ✔ Clean floors such as tiles and hardwood with a damp mop or cloth, and vacuum carpeted areas at least once a week. Do this more often if your child is crawling. A dry mop or cloth pushes dust back into the air and does not get rid of it
- ✔ Clean surfaces with a damp cloth
- ✔ Take off shoes and wipe pets' paws at the door to reduce dirt and dust from entering your home
- ✔ Remove clutter to reduce dust and make cleaning easier



### *Tip*

*Did you know that with regular wear and tear, products like furniture and electronics slowly break down into dust over time. If these products are made with toxic materials, the dust will be toxic too.*

# Step 3:

## Let bad air out, fresh air in

We may not know it, but many things we do at home put pollutants into the air.

### Take these steps to let bad air out, fresh air in:

- ✓ Turn on the fan or open a window when you fry, sauté or grill food
- ✓ Turn on the fan or open a window when you clean or use products like nail polish, hairspray, or craft materials like glue or paint
- ✓ Make sure your air vents are not blocked by objects such as furniture to maintain good air flow
- ✓ Make sure your appliances, such as gas stoves, and heating and cooling systems are working properly
- ✓ Check your ventilation systems and replace or clean the filters and fans often. The manufacturer's instructions or your landlord can tell you how often this should be done. Ventilation systems may be found in your bathroom, kitchen and furnace rooms
- ✓ Make sure you have a carbon monoxide detector in your home and regularly check that the batteries are working
- ✓ Do not use a barbecue or portable fuel-burning equipment inside a home or garage. It can cause carbon monoxide to build up in the home



### Tip

*If you use a window to let fresh air in, think about possible sources of outdoor air pollution around your home, such as heavy traffic or parked cars with running engines. You may want to open the window when traffic is minimized.*

## Step 4:

# Reduce toxic cleaning products

**Many cleaning products you use at home put toxic chemicals into the air your family breathes and on surfaces they touch.**

Cleaning products such as cleaning sprays, liquids and powders, drain cleaners and air fresheners can potentially cause harm to your family's health. There are several effective, less toxic, low-cost household products available to clean your home, especially if you use a little extra muscle.

### Take these steps to reduce toxic cleaning products:

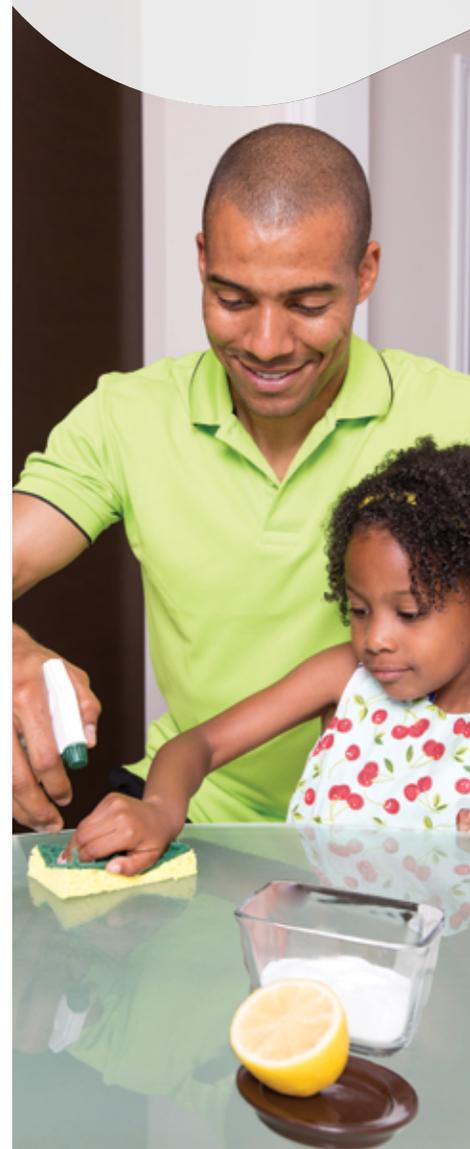
- ✔ Use non-toxic cleaning products more often. Consider using alternatives such as baking soda and vinegar instead of commercial cleaning products
- ✔ Avoid products that come in aerosol spray cans as they can leave chemicals in the air longer

### If you choose to use chemical cleaning products:

- ✔ Always read and follow the label. Learn how to use the products safely and understand the health risks
- ✔ Wear gloves and turn on a fan or open a window during and after use
- ✔ Store products in their original containers and never mix them
- ✔ Always store dangerous products away from children and pets

## Tip

*See pages 8 and 9 to learn more about non-toxic cleaning methods and natural fragrances for your home.*



# Step 5: Keep smoke out

**No amount of second-hand smoke is safe for children to breathe.**

Second hand smoke from tobacco and cannabis (marijuana) is unsafe for children to breathe. The smoke from both of these products have toxic chemicals that can cause serious harm to children's health.

Tobacco smoke can get trapped in your furniture, carpets, toys and clothes when you smoke inside. This is called third-hand smoke, and it can stay in your home for weeks after your smoke. Tobacco smoke can also stick to your hands, skin and hair even if you smoke outside.

The health risks from second-hand vapour from e-cigarettes are unknown. This vapour should also be kept out of the home and away from children to protect their health.

## **Take these steps to keep smoke out:**

- ✔ Make your home smoke-free
- ✔ If you smoke, do it outside and wash your hands when you return
- ✔ Set up an outdoor smoking area away from doors and windows so other people are not exposed



## *Tip*

*If smoke from a neighbour enters your home, talk to your neighbour, property manager, or check out [smokefreehousingon.ca](http://smokefreehousingon.ca)*

# Non-toxic cleaning chart

	What you need	How to use it
<b>To clean:</b>		
<b>Surfaces and floors</b>	Water	Use a damp mop or cloth to clean floors and a damp cloth to clean surfaces.
<b>Windows and glass</b>	Vinegar or lemon juice mixed with water	Mix one tablespoon of vinegar or lemon juice with four cups of water. Spray onto surface and wipe clean with a cloth.
<b>Sinks, tubs, tiles, stove tops</b>	Baking soda and water	Sprinkle baking soda onto surface, scrub with a wet sponge or a cloth and rinse with water.
<b>Toilet bowls</b>	Baking soda or vinegar	Sprinkle baking soda or pour vinegar into the toilet bowl. Scrub with a toilet brush.
<b>Ovens</b>	Baking soda and water paste	<b>Do not heat the oven while cleaning.</b> Put paste on all sides of the oven and let it sit overnight. Be careful to avoid the heating element. Scoop out the baking soda and wipe clean with a damp cloth. Use a scouring pad for tough spots.
<b>To polish:</b>		
<b>Furniture</b>	Lemon juice and vegetable oil	Mix one teaspoon of lemon juice with two cups of vegetable oil. Apply mixture to furniture with a soft cloth.
<b>To deodorize:</b>		
<b>Rugs</b>	Baking soda	Sprinkle baking soda onto rugs and vacuum after 15 minutes.
<b>Refrigerators</b>	Baking soda	Keep an open box of baking soda inside all refrigerators.

Note: The products listed in this chart are not disinfectants. It is recommended that you clean and then disinfect commonly touched surfaces like door knobs, toilet seats and handles, bathroom faucets as well as any areas contaminated with blood or bodily fluids.



# Non-toxic fragrance chart

Your home does not need a fragrant smell to be clean! If you enjoy a fragrance at home, here are some natural options to try.

	What you need	How to use it
<b>To fragrance:</b>		
<b>Indoor air</b>	Essential oils* Cinnamon and cloves Potpourri, herbal or floral bouquets	Try one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mix water with a few drops of essential oil in a spray bottle and spray into the air</li><li>• Simmer cinnamon and cloves in water on the stove</li><li>• Use potpourri, herbal or floral bouquets, or cotton balls scented with essential oil</li></ul>
<b>Cleaning solutions</b>	Lemon Essential oils*	Add lemon juice, lemon peel or a few drops of essential oil into your water and/or vinegar cleaning solution for a fresh smell.
<b>Closets and dressers</b>	Cedar chips or herbs	Place cedar chips, lavender flowers, rosemary, mint, or white peppercorns in your closets and dressers.

\*Essential oils are highly concentrated liquids that come from plants. They come in many scents like lemon, lavender and grapefruit and can be bought at natural food stores. Read the label before using them and keep them away from children and pets.

## *"I like my home to smell clean"*

Some of us use scented cleaning products and air fresheners like candles, sprays or plug-ins to give our home a clean smell. Many of these products have chemicals that can pollute your air instead of clean it. These chemicals can cause allergies and make asthma worse.



# MORE INFORMATION

For more information on how to clean your air at home, please contact York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [york.ca/indoorair](http://york.ca/indoorair)

## **Mould**

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation  
[Preventing Mould in Your Home](#)

Health Canada  
[Addressing Moisture and Mould in Your Home](#)

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
[Flood Cleanup: Keep in Mind Indoor Air Quality After a Flood](#)

## **Dust:**

Health Canada  
[Guidance for Fine Particulate Matter](#)

## **Ventilation:**

Health Canada  
[Ventilation and the Indoor Environment](#)

## **Toxic cleaning products:**

Health Canada  
[Household Chemical Safety](#)

## **Tobacco smoke:**

Health Canada  
[Make Your Home and Car Smoke-Free](#)

Smoke-Free Ontario Housing  
[smokefreehousingon.ca](http://smokefreehousingon.ca)



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