

Common Allergens and Irritants Found in the Classroom

Helpful Tips

- Reduce exposure to chalk dust.
- Choose low or no odor dry erase markers, paints, and glues.
- Fix moisture problems in classrooms, water fountains, and bathrooms.
- Eliminate dusty, musty, messy stacks of papers and books.
- Do not allow any pets in classrooms.
- Enforce no smoking rules.
- Encourage young children who are allergic to dust mites to bring their own covers for sleeping mats and pillows.
- Use only washable stuffed animals; wash them weekly.
- Encourage schools to use integrated pest management (IPM) practices instead of pesticides.
- Make sure students have up-to-date allergy and asthma action plans on file, along with necessary permission to carry and use emergency medications. Carry this information on school trips.
- Keep windows closed on days with high levels of pollen, mold, or pollution.

Steps to Asthma Control

- 1. Work closely with your healthcare team** to understand, manage, and prevent symptoms; keep all routine asthma care visits with your doctor.
- 2. Take all medicines as prescribed;** know their names, when, how, and why to use them.
- 3. Learn what triggers your asthma symptoms;** avoid them as much as possible.
- 4. Treat asthma symptoms as soon as they appear,** following your Asthma Action Plan.

NOTES

- Although all care has been taken, this chart is a general guide only which is not intended to be a substitute for individual medical advice/treatment. The Allergy and Asthma Network and Allergy and Immunology Awareness Program in Qatar expressly disclaims all responsibility (including negligence) for any loss, damage, or personal injury resulting from reliance on the information contained within this booklet.
- We would like to thank the Allergy and Asthma Network for permitting us to include their patient education material in our product.

For more information on asthma visit:

Allergy and immunology awareness program in Qatar:
<http://aiap.hamad.qa>

Allergy and asthma network in Vienna:
allergyasthmanetwork.org



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Allergy and Immunology Awareness Program



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Asthma is an ongoing lung disease that causes episodes of coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Like all chronic illnesses, asthma cannot be cured, but you can prevent and ease symptoms. The key to asthma control is to stay away from the things that irritate your lungs. Most of these things are in the air we breathe.

Indoor allergens and irritants can cause itchy, watery eyes, sneezy, runny nose, sinus and ear congestion, headache, or fatigue. For people with asthma, they can spark coughing, wheezing, and difficulty breathing – and lead to a full-blown asthma attack.

Asthma is a leading chronic illness among children and youth and a principal cause of school absenteeism. Removing allergens, irritants, and contaminants from the air inside the school will reduce student and staff allergy and asthma symptoms, along with the need for medication or emergency treatment.

At the beginning of each school year and after vacations, parents should meet with teachers and school nurses to update the child's asthma action plan and check classrooms for potential asthma or allergy triggers.

Common Allergens and Irritants Found in Classrooms:

Dust Mites



These tiny insects are found in upholstered furniture, naptime floor mats, pillows, stuffed toys, and carpets. They feed off shed human skin wherever there is moisture to survive. Allergens from their dead bodies and waste collect in bedding, furnishings, and dust then irritate airways and eyes on contact.

Solution

- Have children with asthma or allergies bring their own washable covers for sleeping mats or pillows and take them home weekly for washing.
- Minimize the use of stuffed animals for children with asthma.
- Choose classroom furniture padded with vinyl or other materials that are easily wiped down.
- Be sure maintenance personnel vacuum carpets and keep window blinds free of dust.

Pets



Cats, dogs, and other furry or feathered animals shed animal dander – tiny particles of protein from the skin, saliva, and waste that settle in carpets and dust. When disturbed, these allergens fly into the air and irritate the eyes and lungs of sensitive people. No breed is truly 'allergen free.'

Solution

Do not allow any animals into the classroom.

Mold



Mold grows in damp areas, both indoors and out, sending tiny spores flying through the air and into the lungs. Some molds are toxic.

Solution

- Check classrooms for leaky pipes or water damage and report to maintenance.
- Store water and food overnight in sealed containers.
- Do not keep potted plants in the classroom, as mold can grow on pots and in soil.

Cockroaches and Rodents



Allergens from insects and rodents settle in house dust, upholstery, and bedding, where they are easily inhaled. These pests need water and food to survive.

Solution

- Fix leaky pipes or other sources of moisture.
- Clean crumbs and food spills; keep food in sealed containers.
- Enforce safe food handling and storage policies.

Secondhand Smoke



Secondhand smoke is dangerous. For people with asthma, especially young children, it can set off symptoms and cause long-term lung damage.

Solution

Enforce no-smoking policies for students and staff on school grounds.

Germes and Bacteria



Respiratory viruses and bacterial infections set off asthma symptoms in people of all ages.

Solution

- Make sure students wash their hands before and after eating and recess.
- Encourage the use of tissues for coughs and sneezes.
- Ask students who are ill with colds or flu to stay home until healthy.



Chemicals and Strong Odors

Perfume, air fresheners, scented dry-erase markers, paints, and glues from art or science projects irritate lungs and set off asthma symptoms in students and staff.

Solution

- Use low or no odor dry erase markers, art, and science supplies.
- Establish a 'no perfume' classroom rule.
- Skip the scented air fresheners and candles.

Other Airborne Irritants



Chalk dust is an immediate irritant for anyone who breathes it, especially those with asthma.

Solution

- Clean chalkboards and erasers when students are out of the room.
- Seat students with asthma away from chalkboards.