

## Healthy Home Spring Cleaning Tips

Spring is just around the corner. Are you planning to clean out your home or make repairs to the wears and tears from this especially wet winter? In this article we will talk about ways you can get your home clean, healthy and safe from hazards harboring in your home that can affect your health. Here are some tips from the Lead-Safe and Healthy Homes Initiative to help you get your home in the right shape and keep you healthier this spring season:

### **1. Cleaning the home from indoor allergens**

Regularly wash and clean beddings, stuffed teddy bears, curtains, etc. – they trap moisture and odor and are magnets for allergy-causing dust mites to flourish. Clean or replace air filters and vent grills to improve removal of allergens in the air – thereby decreasing one's exposure to allergens. Never dry dust, instead, use clean clothes to damp-wipe; wool clothes (wool creates static when rubbed on a surface and dust will adhere to the clothes); non-fragranced micro-fiber clothes; and/or HEPA vacuum cleaner. Allergens should be removed by mechanical means and avoid using chemicals such as polishes or air fresheners to do the work.

### **2. Clean Your Home with Home-made Non-toxic Products** – they are just as effective as commercial products and will not leave residues or air contaminants that can trigger or exacerbate allergy symptoms. Use of commercial products may create more harm or unintended health effect than the hazards/problems they are trying to eliminate. For more recipe on making “green” or low-toxic cleaning product visit our website at [www.healthyhomesRCHD.com](http://www.healthyhomesRCHD.com) for brochure on Green Cleaning –Healthy Homes Safer Household Cleaners

#### Cleaning the Drains

Chemical drain cleaners are extremely corrosive and dangerous, containing such toxic ingredients as lye or sulphuric acid. Instead pour 1 quart of boiling water,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of baking soda, followed by  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of vinegar down the drain weekly.

#### Cleaning the Windows

Try this homemade solution: add 3 tablespoons of distilled white vinegar and a  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon of dishwater detergent to 3 cups of water.

#### Cleaning the Floor

Don't try to disinfect it. Unless you disinfect your feet, there's no point. Instead, use these homemade cleaners for hardwood or laminated floors: add  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of white vinegar or  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of borax into 1 gallon of water. Use only 100 percent cotton terry towels on hardwood floors. It is not recommended to use microfiber mops that contain fragrance.

#### Clean Tough Dirt without Harsh Chemicals

Keeping a box of borax around for extra-tough cleaning jobs is a good start. Borax is a natural product made of sodium, boron, oxygen and water and it's unbeatable for tough cleaning jobs, as a bleach substitute.

*Other simple household items for cleaning include dish detergent, salt, baking soda and white vinegar.*

### **3. Organize Cabinets and Shelves**

Check the garage, basement, under the sink, and around the house for old or rusted cans of paint, thinners, oils, solvents, stains, potentially toxic cleaning products and other forms of "toxic" trash. Dispose of these or call your city or county sanitation department to find the location of the hazardous waste drop-off center. Household chemicals need to be properly stored and secured, away from the reach of young children and potential ignition source. Collect old batteries throughout the house for disposal in a battery recycling or hazardous waste center. Discard expired medications and old prescription medications no longer in use. Your pharmacist can advise you about the best way to dispose of old medications, since tossing them into the toilet or garbage may be hazardous to the environment.

### **4. Clean Mold and Mildew**

Best way to prevent mold or mildew growth is to have adequate ventilation. Mold can be found everywhere, but it flourishes in humid conditions. Use mechanical ventilation and/or open windows to remove excess moisture. Check for and repair the source or root cause of water intrusion, condensation, and/or moisture accumulation before cleaning out mold or mildew. Never shake or rough-handling of items contaminated with mold or mildew to avoid release and distribution of mold spores into the air and onto other nearby items. Fixing those issues can improve your home's indoor air quality. Wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, face masks, and hair covering to avoid exposure. Visit our website for brochure "Healthy Homes Approach Towards Controlling Asthma Triggers" for more information on safe cleaning products to use and how to avoid generation of mold spores while doing clean-up. Do not

use a dehumidifier unless one understands how to and can properly operate and maintain the equipment or else it can pose more harm than good.

## **5. Make Your Home Lead-Safe**

If you live in a home built before 1978, it is possible your home may have lead-based paint. Therefore, any damages to or repair work that can disturb it, will cause generation of lead debris and dust hazard. Young children during growth spurts are at risk of being lead poisoned if they are exposed to lead dust and debris. Young children should be checked for lead poisoning via blood lead screening from physician if they live in an old house built before 1978 if peeling paints is present or repair work had occurred.

Stabilize and paint over or replace any painted surfaces with peeling or chipped paint in the home to control lead hazard generation and avoid lead poisoning. Frequently clean areas around painted surfaces, especially near friction points such as windows, window wells and sills, door trims and jamb (both inside and outside). If windows have lead-based paint either on the inside or outside and need to be opened, open it from the top to prevent lead dust from accumulating on the sill. Similarly, clean blinds frequently to remove lead dust that may be accumulating on the surfaces using damp wipe technique.

## **6. Get Rid of Rodents and Cockroaches – they carry diseases and can trigger allergic symptoms.**

If there are holes or cracks on foundation or exterior walls, one might find signs of rodent harborage during the cold season. First, fix any holes and cracks that can cause pest entrance. Clean up and remove food debris and standing water, and get rid of clutter to eliminate their source of food and shelter. Rodent's dander, urine, and feces and cockroach's shedding and feces are known asthma triggers. However, aerosolized pesticides may do more harm than good for people with asthma and allergies. If you have a pest problem, use roach bait and hotels or hire an exterminator who employs an Integrated Pest Management approach and has experience treating homes of people with asthma or contact allergy sensitivity.

## **7. Check your Floor covering**

Check rugs, carpets, and mats to be sure that they are intact (free of trip hazard), clean, and dry. Make sure rugs on bare floors have non-skid mats, to prevent trips and falls. Older floor covering that have become stained and worn

will need to be HEPA vacuumed, washed or replaced to minimize dust mite harborage and mold growth.

#### **8. Change the batteries in your smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector.**

It has been proven that the easiest way to save lives from fire or carbon monoxide poisoning is to have working smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors. It is recommended to check them every 6 months.

#### **9. Use a High Efficiency Air Particulate (HEPA) Vacuum**

Make sure the HEP vacuum cleaner is fitted with HEPA filter, HEPA bag and has tight seams and seals around the casing to prevent dust particles from leaking out while vacuuming. One should take care to prevent re-entrainment of dust while emptying a canister or changing a bag – if not careful, this would defeat the purpose of vacuuming.

#### **10. Have Trees Trimmed**

Spring is the time for storms and high winds. Both can cause heavy tree limbs to break off and come crashing down on your home, garage, AC unit, car or fence. Getting the trees trimmed ahead of spring (before the growing season) can save money and keep tree branches from damaging the property - thus allowing pest to enter into homes.

**These home cleaning and maintenance tips for the coming spring will have your home in great shape this year.**

*Written by Rafiat Williams*