



## Allergies & Asthma – trigger secrets revealed!

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With harvest time in the air, complaints about asthma and allergies are on the rise. But harvest isn't the only breathing culprit in town.

At the "Clearing the Air – Straight talk on Asthma & Allergies" workshop North Basin Medical Clinics sponsored, we were fortunate to hear from Dan Robison, an EPA expert on indoor air quality and asthma. In his work, Dan has come across five major allergy and asthma trigger categories and has discovered how they walk into our homes, undetected, right under our noses.

**DUST** – Dust is the most common trigger, but Dan says there's more to dust than dirt. He's found very high levels of lead, PCBs, chrome, cigarette residue and pesticides in dust. As a matter of fact, this chemical group is a major dust component.

Just how does lead get into house dust? On our shoes! Dan has tested hundreds of carpets for allergens and has found surprisingly high levels of chemical dust. Leaded gasoline was common for years. Spilled on the ground in many places, that lead does not go away. It gets tracked into your house every day. It's the same with pesticides. They're on our grass, the dirt, roads and sidewalks around our homes.

And inside your home, dust mites can play havoc with your asthma and allergies.

Dust mites are microscopic organisms that live on dust. When they die, which is often, their bodies become part of the dust we breathe in. They live in our carpets, furniture and bedding. Dan says they especially like pillows and down comforters. As a matter of fact, if you don't have your pillow cleaned regularly, 40 percent of the pillow's weight is likely made up of dust mite carcasses.

**CIGARETTE SMOKE** -- We all know cigarette smoke is irritating and dangerous, but how dangerous is it if we smoke outdoors? Very.

Even if you smoke outdoors, 90 percent of the chemicals and smoke from your cigarette attach to your clothes, especially your jacket or shirt. When you come back in the house these allergens hitch a ride right in with you.

**CONSUMER CHEMICALS** -- Our society is hooked on consumer chemicals -- cleaners, solvents, hair and beauty aids, pesticides and fertilizers. A recent study of Los Angeles air quality showed consumer chemicals to be the second largest product in the smog there.

Now, we're not talking about factory use. We're talking about hair spray, perfume, window cleaner, air freshener and other products being used inside our homes. If products being used in the home can have that big an effect on outdoor air pollution, indoor air quality has to be severely compromised.

**PETS** – The vast majority of pets have the ability to trigger allergies, mostly through shedding fur. Cat dander, for instance, is so small and so light it takes 10 hours to settle. If you have a cat, dander is always in the air. And don't forget the power of pests such as cockroaches, mice and termites to stir up allergies.

**MOLD & MOISTURE** – Mold is an insidious allergy trigger. Caused by uncontrolled moisture, it can hide in walls and under flooring. Mold spores are so small they can even become airborne. Here are some hints you may have uncontrolled moisture in your home. Do you have an unvented clothes drier or shower? Do you have any leaky faucets or pipes? Do you over-water your plants? Do you clean and dry your humidifier and air conditioner often? All of these things harbor mold, a major allergy trigger.

The bottom line here is there are some easy things you can do to eliminate allergy triggers from your home.

- Do not wear shoes in the house.
- Wear a smoking jacket when smoking outdoors. Take it off before coming back in.
- Replace household chemicals with non-toxic products (see below).
- Clean pillows and bedding weekly. Replace down pillows with foam.
- Control moisture sources. Vent showers and driers. Fix leaks. Don't over water plants.
- Bathe pets often. Keep them outside and out of bedrooms.
- Purchase a Hepa filter. They do work. Dan also recommends purchase of a Hoover Wind Tunnel vacuum. It has internal sensors to tell you when the majority of dust is gone from the area you're vacuuming. You may vacuum longer, but your carpet will definitely be cleaner.

To further research indoor air quality, Asthma and allergens, log on to [www.alaw.org](http://www.alaw.org). A good source to find non-toxic consumer products is "The Safe Shoppers Bible: a Consumer's Guide to Non-toxic Household Products, Cosmetics and Foods" by Dr. Samuel Epstein.