

## **ECA Mold Services San Francisco Bay Area**

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### **Allergens and Asthma**

An allergen is a substance that causes an allergic reaction in individuals sensitive to it. Common household allergens include **cat and dog dander; dust mites; mouse, rat, and cockroach residues.**

According to a study done by the Children's Hospital Medical Center of Cincinnati, more than 2 million children and adolescents in United States between ages 6 and 16 with asthma might not have the disease if risk factors were removed from their homes. The elimination of household allergens and pollutants could reduce asthma nearly 40%. Pets appear to be the major risk factor. Children and adolescents who had history of allergies to a pet were 2.4 times likely to have a doctor-diagnosed asthma. The contribution of environmental risk factors to asthma is considerably larger than family history or heredity.

### **Animal Dander**

Proteins in the dander, urine, feces, and saliva of warm-blooded animals have been reported to sensitize individuals and can cause allergic reactions or trigger asthma. The most effective method of controlling animal allergens in the home is not to allow an animal indoors. If animals are allowed, their presence should be limited to areas of hardwood, tile, vinyl, or stone flooring. Pets should never be allowed in carpeted bedrooms.

**Homebuyers with allergies are advised to test their homes, bedrooms in particular, for the presence of common household allergens. ECA provides Allergen Screen Testing or Specific Allergen Testing.**

### **Healthy Holiday Tips**

The winter holidays is a time when we close the doors, turn up the heat, and spend more time indoors. As a result, this is also a time to pay closer attention to our indoor air quality. We have recently inspected a number of Bay Area homes with serious indoor pollution and mold issues that could have been easily avoided. Here are our top healthy home tips for the holidays...

#### **All the rooms of your home need regular air circulation and heat**

When you go on vacation, adjust your home's thermostat so that the home stays moderately heated - even while you are away.

#### **Don't close heating registers in unused rooms to "save energy"**

Your home's forced air heating system was designed to deliver heated air to all rooms in the home. Closing the registers in one room does not save energy -- rather it delivers more heated air to other areas of the home. Unheated rooms are the most susceptible to surface condensation, elevated humidity, and fungal growth. We frequently see well-intentioned homeowners create indoor mold problems because of this very common error.

**Maintain indoor humidity between 40-60%**

Extra guests during the holiday season will generate added moisture in your home. Monitor humidity levels in your home by purchasing a humidity sensor (called a "hygrometer"). Recommended indoor humidity levels should be between 40-60%(1)

### **Use exhaust fans**

Mold requires moisture to grow. Most of the moisture in a home comes from bathing, cooking, and breathing. Use bathroom fans during and after bathing to remove humidity before it has a chance to build up in your home. When cooking, use your kitchen exhaust fan. Don't air dry clothing indoors. Keep bedrooms heated and keep bedroom doors open as much as possible to encourage air circulation.

### **Avoid Surface Condensation by reducing humidity**

Elevated indoor humidity often leads to surface condensation on exterior walls and windows. During the winter, uninsulated exterior walls tend to be colder and prone to condensation and fungal growth. Monitor and reduce indoor humidity levels. Keep large furniture twelve inches away from exterior walls to encourage air circulation. Don't stuff closets full, and keep closet doors partially open.

### **Change Furnace Filters**

Your furnace filters need to be changed every 3-4 months. If they are getting really dirty in 3-4 months, then there may be a problem with duct leakage in your home, which should be evaluated by a licensed heating contractor. On the other hand, if the filter never gets dirty, this could be a sign that the filter is not sized properly. A rule-of-thumb with air filters is that if you can see through the filter, it will not be effective at filtering out fine particulates. Consider using a replacement pleated paper filter, but first contact your heating contractor for advice to match the right filter for your furnace.

### **Keep your home dry**

This goes for both the inside, the outside, and the "under-side" of your home. Proper grading and drainage around the home is important to prevent ponding water under the home. Extend downspouts to direct water away from the structure. Ponding water under a home can lead to mold growth, fungal deterioration, pest and rodent activity, and odor entry into your home. Keep your home dry (again)

(1) Recommended by ASHRAE - American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air Conditioning Engineers.

**We wish you a Healthy Holiday Season**