

Air Pollution and Asthma

This category covers a wide range of toxic chemicals and pollutants, whether from industrial or vehicle pollution outdoors, or from the use of wood stoves, volatile organic compounds, or other substances indoors. Combustion by-products (e.g., nitrogen dioxide) and other pollutants can be respiratory irritants. Solvents and other chemicals can be found in building materials and can volatilize during the 1-2 year period after new construction. Diesel exhaust from school buses and other forms of air pollution can also worsen asthma. Health care providers may want to sign up for Enviroflash email or pager notification of air quality forecasts in areas where it is offered. (For more information, see: <http://www.enviroflash.info/>)

Additional History Questions to Supplement the History Form:

Indoor Air Pollution Questions

- Do you live in a home that was built in the past 1-2 years?
- If you recently made changes to your house – installed new carpets, painted, or other changes – how long ago was that?
- Was there a change in your child's asthma symptoms after moving to a new house or having the work mentioned above done in your home?
- Do you ever notice a chemical smell in your home?
- If you have a wood burning fireplace or stove, how many times per month in the winter do you use it?
- Does anyone in your house use strong-smelling perfumes, scented candles, hairsprays, or other aerosol substances?

Outdoor Air Pollution Questions

- Do you live within 300 yards of a major roadway or highway? _____ An area where trucks or other vehicles idle? _____ A major industry with smokestacks? _____
- Is residential or agricultural burning a problem where you live?
- How do you hear about air quality alerts?

Possible Interventions:

For **indoor** air pollution, the two best approaches to reducing indoor air pollution are source control and ventilation.

- **Eliminate tobacco smoke**
- **Use good housekeeping practices to control particles**
- **Install an exhaust fan close to the source of contaminants, and vent it to the outside**
- Properly ventilate the room where a fuel-burning appliance is being used
- Ensure that wood stove doors are tight-fitting
- Follow manufacturers' instructions when using an unvented kerosene or gas space heater
- Ensure that fireplaces are properly vented so smoke escapes through the chimney
- Never use a gas-cooking appliance as a heating source
- Open windows especially when indoor pollutant sources are in use (this option must be balanced against the concern of mold or other plant allergens and outdoor air pollution)
- Parents should change clothes prior to returning from work if they work around any strong smelling chemicals or paints or other toxic substances
- Avoid strong odors and minimize use of products and materials that emit irritants, such as smoke, strong perfumes, talcum powder, hair sprays, cleaning products, paint fumes, sawdust, chalk dust, air freshener sprays, and insect sprays

Outdoor air pollution, especially ozone and particulate matter can increase asthma symptoms.

- **Monitor air quality index levels and reduce your child's outdoor activities when the AQI is in the unhealthy range**
- **If your child's symptoms are worse or he/she requires more albuterol (rescue medicine) the day after AQI levels are in the unhealthy range, contact your health care provider**
- Use HEPA filters in household vents
- Reduce use of candles, wood-burning stoves and fireplaces
- If particle pollution levels are high outdoors, do not vacuum the floor since this increases particle levels indoors
- Advise your child to stay away from the exhaust pipe of idling school buses and trucks
- Consider moving to a new location if this is possible

Follow-Up / Notes: