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Safe At Home

The *Safe at Home* newsletter is produced by the Safe and Healthy Homes Program of the Allegheny County Health Department. Quarterly we will be addressing relevant and timely home health and safety issues pertinent to our community partners and the populations they serve. Feel free to print and distribute any information from our newsletter that is relevant to your staff and clients.

Please let us know if there are any particular issues that may be of interest, and we will do our best to accommodate these requests.

We look forward to working with you and your families to make their homes safer and healthier. As always, we encourage you to refer any families that may desire to learn more about their home and the hazards which exist.



Cosmetic and Personal Care Product Poisoning

March is National Poison Prevention Month. When we think of poisons in our home, we commonly think of items such as cleaning products and medications. We tend to take special precautions when storing these items because we know that they are toxic to children, especially children under the age of six. In 2018, Poison Control reported that nearly half of all poisonings (44.2%) occurred in children under the age of six with 99.4% of those being unintentional poisonings.

What many people do not realize is that other commonly used household products can be considered poisons if used improperly. This includes cosmetics and personal care products. According to the National Poison Data System (NPDS), the most common substances children under age six are poisoned by are cosmetics and personal care products. These include items such as hand sanitizer, makeup, hair products, shampoo, soaps, lotions, perfumes, and deodorants. Since we use these products daily on ourselves and our children, we tend to leave them out where children can easily access them.



Below are a few recommendations to be safe at home and help prevent children from being poisoned.

1) Properly Store Poisons in the Home

The best way to store poisons in the home is out of reach of children and locked up. Child safety devices such as cabinet locks, multi-purpose latches, and doorknob covers can be used to keep children away from household poisons. These devices can be found online and in home improvement stores.

2) Keep Poisons in the Original Containers

Do not store poisons in containers that originally held or were designed to hold food and drink to prevent accidental poisoning. Make sure containers are properly labeled with what is stored inside them. Original container labels may also include information on what to do if the product is accidentally swallowed.

3) Know the Number for Poison Control

It is recommended to have the number for the Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222 or text 'Poison' to 797979) saved in a cell phone and posted in the home. The phone number works 24/7 across the U.S. In the event of a poisoning, it is faster to call the Poison Control Center first rather than calling 911. Poison Control will ask questions, provide advice, dispatch emergency services, and give directions to the nearest poison center for treatment.



For more information on how to prevent childhood poisonings, please see the following links:

Poison Control Center <https://www.poison.org/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/safecild/poisoning/index.html>

American Academy of Pediatrics <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/news-features-and-safety-tips/Pages/Poison-Prevention-Tips-from-the-American-Academy-of-Pediatrics.aspx>

Water Intrusion in the Home

Everyone knows April showers bring May flowers but what else does it bring? For a lot of people, it also brings excess moisture in to the home. The ideal humidity (the concentration of water vapor in the air) in a home is 30-50%. It is not uncommon in Western PA to have old homes with porous foundations, old ill-fitting windows, and other issues in need of repair allowing in rain water. The showers are good for the flowers, not so good for our homes. So, what are the health concerns of this excess moisture and what do we do about it?

The effects of excessive moisture in the home may include mold growth, chipping/peeling paint, rotting wood and metal corrosion. It also creates a favorable environment for dust mites, bacteria, and pests like cockroaches, and more. What we really want to avoid are the health effects on the occupants in the home such as depression, irritation or onset of asthma and allergies, and if your home was built before 1978, potentially even lead poisoning as the paint on surfaces becomes compromised. According to an article in the American Journal of Public Health, World Health Organization data shows that, "...poor drainage, building structural problems, and leaky roofs produced increased odds ratios for asthma of 54%, 27%, and 35%, respectively." Unfortunately, later in that article it also says, "...leaks and moisture issues are more common in low-income and minority housing." Therefore, it should be no surprise that a manuscript in the Annals of Epidemiology states, "Asthma disproportionately affects minority and disadvantaged children, including residents of federally assisted housing". There are a lot of things that can contribute to the moisture indoors. Anything that is drying such as, clothes on a line, clothes in a dryer without venting to outside, used towels, or even spills are all adding to the humidity in your home. Some plants can help with air quality, but they may release more moisture, while other plants can draw moisture from the air. You may also have plumbing leaks adding to the moisture level in your home, but what we want to focus on in this article is rain water.

Some helpful tips to keep rain water from entering your home are as follows:

- Make sure your gutters are not clogged or damaged so that they drain properly into the downspouts.
- Check that your downspouts are properly connected, not split open, clogged, or crushed.
- Assure that the water is discharging away from your foundation and not flowing back towards it, and that there are no puddles near the foundation.
- Check for gaps in siding and brick mortar as it takes only a very small opening for water to find its way in.
- Trim back any landscaping to allow airflow around the home.
- Check your roof for curling, buckling, broken, torn or missing shingles or granules of asphalt from shingles where downspouts discharge as these could be signs of a leaky roof.

Roof leaks may not always appear in the attic or on the ceiling of the top floor, water may travel down the roof slope and drip into walls. Inside the home move items away from walls to identify leaks, limit what gets wet, and allow airflow for easier drying. If mold does start to grow wipe it down with a household cleaner. Some heating/air conditioning systems have humidity controls built in, even if there are no controls running those systems will help remove moisture from the home. Another way to control humidity in the home is with a stand-alone dehumidifier, especially in areas of the home where there is moisture such as a basement. Open windows to increase fresh air and air movement. Use any exhaust fans that exist in the home. If there are none consider installing one vented to the outside.

Hopefully these tips will help you maintain that recommended 30-50% humidity in your home. As always, we strive to make and keep your living environment as safe and healthy as possible!

For further reading on the subject check out these links:

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/how-avoid-correct-home-moisture-problems>

<https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/residence/minimize-excess-moisture-for-a-healthier-home>

<https://www.homeclimates.com/blog/tips-controlling-homes-humidity>



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