

# TIPS TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH AT HOME



Every day, we are exposed to chemicals and pollutants in the air, water, soil, food and products we use in our home. Here are some tips on how to help protect yourself and those around you.

If you rent your home, speak to your landlord if you are concerned about the possible health effects of chemicals and pollutants in your rental unit. You may have concerns about carbon monoxide, mould, lead, asbestos or radon.



Health  
Canada









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## BUY, USE, AND STORE HOUSEHOLD CHEMICAL PRODUCTS SAFELY

Read the label and follow all instructions for safety, use, and disposal. Look for and understand hazard symbols found on the front of household chemical products.

CORROSIVE	POISON	FLAMMABLE	EXPLOSIVE
 	 	 	 

Store household chemical products, tightly closed in their original containers. Keep them safely locked away and out of reach and sight of children and pets.

Never mix household chemical products together. Some mixtures, such as bleach and ammonia, can produce harmful gases. Keep these products away from food, water sources, and open flames.

Call a poison centre or your health care provider right away if you suspect someone has been harmed by a household chemical product.



## DISPOSE OF MEDICATIONS AND HOUSEHOLD CHEMICAL PRODUCTS SAFELY



**Bring unused and expired prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications and natural health products to your local pharmacy for proper disposal.**

Take leftover household chemical products to a hazardous waste disposal depot. Be sure to check with your municipality. **Don't put medications or chemical products down the drain or flush them down the toilet.** Proper disposal will help prevent the contamination of our soil, air and water.



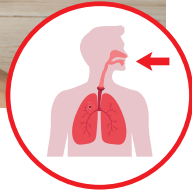
## STORE LAUNDRY PACKETS AND STAIN REMOVER SAFELY



**Laundry packets can be attractive to children and adults with cognitive impairment, and mistaken for food or toys because of their small size and bright colours.** Seek immediate emergency medical attention if you suspect someone has swallowed one of these products. If swallowed, these products can result in severe abdominal pain, vomiting or breathing difficulty.



## MINIMIZE YOUR EXPOSURE TO TALC



**Avoid inhaling loose powders containing talc, as it may be harmful to your lungs.** This can include baby powders, and loose body and face powders. Using products containing talc on the female genital area may cause ovarian cancer.



## AVOID USING BORIC ACID WHILE DOING ARTS AND CRAFTS



**Avoid using boric acid (borax, contact lens solution, eye wash solution) to make slime, dough, putty or modeling clay.** Overexposure to boric acid could affect human development and reproduction. To reduce exposure, wash your hands after use and be careful not to get any in your mouth.



## CHECK FOR LEAD PAINT



**Homes built before 1991 may have lead-based paint or base coats of lead-based paint beneath the newer ones. Have the paint in your home tested if you think it may contain lead.** A certified inspector can measure paint lead levels in your home, or you can mail paint chip samples to a testing laboratory. If you have lead-based paint, consider hiring a professional to remove it. Painting over it can be an acceptable option if the underlying leaded paint

isn't disturbed. Don't sand, scrape or burn off leaded paint as it can release harmful dust. Lead can cause many harmful health effects, especially to the brain, nervous system, blood system and kidneys. Exposure to lead, even at low levels, poses the greatest risk to young children because their bodies are still developing.



## REDUCE YOUR EXPOSURE TO LEAD IN YOUR DRINKING WATER



**The National Plumbing Code allowed lead as a material in pipes until 1975 and allowed the use of lead-based solder in plumbing until 1986. Some other brass plumbing parts or faucets may also contain lead.** This lead can leach into drinking water if it has been sitting in the pipes for several hours. If you're concerned about lead or other metals in your drinking water, let tap water run until it's cold before using it for drinking,

cooking or preparing baby food. This can help reduce your risk of exposure to lead and other metals from your plumbing. Every month, inspect the aerators or screens at the tap. If you find debris, clean it out to remove any particles that may contain lead. A household water filter at the tap is an effective way to remove lead from your water. Ensure that you install and maintain the filter properly, and that it's certified to the NSF International standard for removal of lead.



## CHECK FOR ASBESTOS



**Before 1990, asbestos was commonly used for fireproofing and insulating against cold weather and noise.** You may wish to contact a professional to test for asbestos if you're planning renovations or demolitions and your home has building materials that you think may contain asbestos. This includes materials like insulation, exterior siding, floor or ceiling tiles, cement and plaster. If a professional finds asbestos, hire a qualified asbestos

removal specialist to get rid of it before starting work. Avoid disturbing asbestos materials yourself since this could increase the risk to your health and your family's health. Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause cancer and other diseases. There are usually no significant health risks if materials containing asbestos are tightly bound in products and in good condition, sealed behind walls and floorboards, isolated in an attic, and left undisturbed.

### WHERE YOU CAN FIND ASBESTOS

- ✓ Building Insulation
- ✓ Floor and Ceiling Tiles
- ✓ House Siding
- ✓ Furnaces and Heating Systems
- ✓ Car and Truck Brake Pads
- ✓ Cement and Plaster



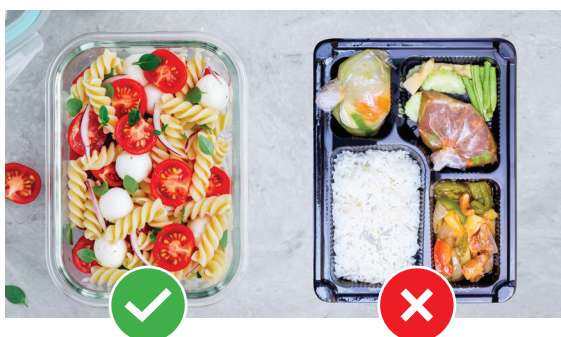
## STORE YOUR FOOD SAFELY



**Store food in food-grade containers, such as glass or stainless steel.** Avoid pouring hot liquids into plastic containers not intended for holding hot food. The heat may allow the plastic to leach into your food.



## USE MICROWAVE SAFE CONTAINERS



**Remove food from any packaging that isn't microwave-safe, such as styrofoam trays or some plastic containers, before heating.** Use glass, ceramic and plastic containers and plastic wrap that are labelled microwave safe. Single-use containers, like margarine or yogurt tubs, tend to warp or melt in the microwave, potentially causing harmful chemicals to leach into your food.



## USE YOUR RANGE HOOD WHEN COOKING



**Operate a range hood on the highest setting when using your oven or stove to vent water vapour and air pollutants.** If you don't have a range hood or fan that vents outside, open windows when possible. Tiny particles of cooked food, fat, and oil get into the air when we fry, roast, broil, sauté, toast, bake or burn food.



## TEST YOUR HOME FOR RADON GAS



**Radon is a radioactive gas that occurs naturally when the uranium in soil and rock breaks down.** It is invisible, odourless and tasteless. When radon is released from the ground into the outdoor air, it is diluted and is not a concern. However, in enclosed spaces like homes, it can accumulate to high levels. High radon levels can be a risk to the health of you and your family.

- **Radon exposure is the #1 cause of lung cancer in non-smokers.** Exposure to high levels of radon in indoor air results in an increased risk of developing lung cancer. The risk of cancer depends on the level of radon and how long a person is exposed to those levels. Exposure to radon and tobacco use together can significantly increase your risk of lung cancer.
- **All homes in Canada have radon gas in them.** Radon concentration levels will vary from one house to another, even if they are similar designs and next door to each other. No matter the age, type of construction or where your home is located, the only way to be sure of the radon level in your home is to test.
- **Test your home for radon to reduce the risk of lung cancer for you and your family.** To purchase a long-term test kit visit [www.takeactiononradon.ca](http://www.takeactiononradon.ca). You must closely follow the instructions to properly complete the test for a minimum of 3 months during fall or winter months.



## MAKE YOUR HOME SMOKE-FREE



**Toxic chemicals found in tobacco and cannabis smoke are inhaled when people breathe in second-hand smoke.** Non-smokers exposed to second-hand smoke have an increased risk of lung cancer, coronary heart disease and respiratory illnesses.



## REDUCE THE USE OF CANDLES AND INCENSE



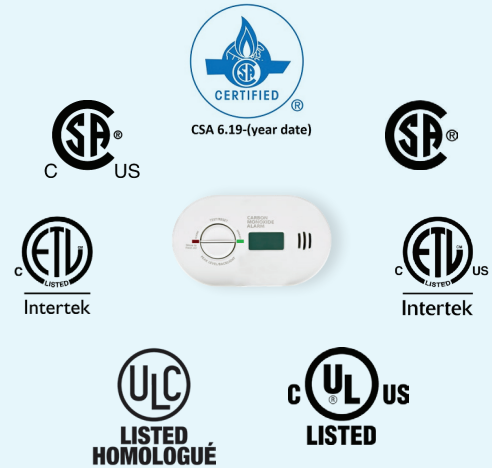
**Candles and incense can be a source of particles and other indoor air pollutants.** Particles typically consist of smoke, soot, liquid or solid particles in aerosol, or biological matter like mould, bacteria, pollen and animal dander. They can be harmful to your health if you inhale them.



## INSTALL CERTIFIED SMOKE AND CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) ALARMS

Buy smoke and CO alarms with a Canadian certification mark such as CSA, cUL, ULC or cETL directly on the product. Install at least 1 CO alarm particularly in hallways near bedrooms, preferably 1 per floor. Test your smoke and CO alarms regularly. Replace the batteries and the alarm itself as recommended by the manufacturer. Exposure to CO can lead to health problems ranging from tiredness and headaches to chest pain and even death, depending on how much CO is in the air. **If you rent**, check for Canadian certified smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in your rental unit.

### CANADIAN CERTIFICATIONS FOR CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS



## PREVENT THE SPREAD OF MOULD



**Inspect your home for visible signs of mould or areas with too much moisture.** Keep humidity levels between 30 and 50%, using a humidifier or dehumidifier if necessary. Look for stains or discoloration on floors, walls, window panes, fabrics and carpets. Check for a musty “earthy” odour. If you find small amounts of mould, clean them up with dish soap and water. You don’t need to use bleach. Consider hiring a professional (or talking to your landlord) to clean up large areas of

mould or if the mould keeps coming back after you clean it. Be sure to fix the underlying cause (water damage, too much humidity or not enough ventilation) to prevent more mould from coming back. Exposure to mould can lead to health effects, like eye, nose and throat irritation, and can make asthma symptoms worse.

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### THINGS THAT CAN GET MOULDY



Furniture



Carpets



Toys



Ceilings



Books



Bathrooms



Walls



Pillows /  
Mattresses



Anything that  
can get wet



## REDUCE DUST AND PARTICULATE MATTER



**Clean** hard floors and surfaces with a wet cloth or mop to remove dust and dirt.



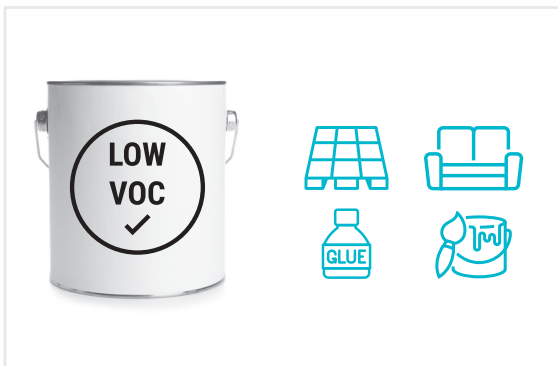
**Vacuum** weekly. If possible, use a vacuum with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to trap small particles, including dust.



Use mattress and pillow covers and **wash** bedding weekly. Exposure to dust and dust mites can cause allergic reactions and make pre-existing health conditions, such as asthma, worse.



## USE AND CHOOSE LOW-VOC PRODUCTS



Use products labelled “low emission” or “low VOC” as they may give off fewer volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Paint, varnish and glues often have a noticeable smell that comes from emissions containing VOCs. Choose composite wood products that have met established formaldehyde limits. These products will have a “TSCA Title VI compliant” label statement. Composite wood products include furniture, cabinets, countertops and flooring. Formaldehyde is a common VOC.



## REDUCE OZONE IN YOUR HOME



You can reduce ozone levels in your home by using an air conditioner instead of opening windows when ozone is at its peak (usually in the afternoon), and by choosing air purifiers carefully, as some air purifiers and other electronic equipment release small amounts of ozone into your home. Ground-level ozone is a key component in urban smog and can pollute indoor air. Prolonged exposure to ozone can result in decreased lung function.

**Health Canada is the federal department responsible for helping the people of Canada maintain and improve their health.** Health Canada is committed to improving the lives of all of Canada’s people and to making this country’s population among the healthiest in the world as measured by longevity, lifestyle, and effective use of the public health care system.

Également disponible en français sous le titre : Conseils pour votre santé à la maison.

**To obtain additional information, please contact: Health Canada**

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