



Take Action on Asthma

Environmental triggers of asthma and allergies



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA

What are asthma and allergies?

They are both conditions where the body reacts to substances commonly found in the air. Asthma is a very common condition that causes the airways of the lungs to tighten, making breathing difficult. Symptoms of allergies include sneezing, runny nose, sore eyes and itchy throat. Asthma is often an allergic condition and it is common for asthma sufferers to also have allergic symptoms.

An asthma attack is when your lungs aren't getting enough air to breathe. You might be having an asthma attack if you have:

- **trouble breathing**
- **wheezing**
- **coughing**
- **chest pain**

Exposure to triggers found in the home and outdoors can cause or worsen respiratory symptoms, including asthma. Knowing how to spot and remove triggers can help prevent you or your child developing asthma or allergies, or improve your symptoms.

This leaflet looks at environmental triggers commonly found in the home and outdoor air, and outlines how to deal with them.

What causes asthma attacks?

The precise causes of asthma and allergies are not known. Most people who have asthma or allergies are not ill all the time, but their symptoms are triggered by things around them. Many of these triggers are found in the air.

Did you know?

Asthma cannot be cured, but with the help of your GP and an asthma action plan, you can make sure you stay active and healthy. Evidence suggests those with a personalised asthma action plan are four times less likely to have an emergency admission to hospital for their asthma. For a free asthma action plan and further advice on how to manage your symptoms visit the National Asthma Campaign website: www.asthma.org.uk.

Triggers in the home

We spend an average of 90 per cent of our time indoors breathing the air inside buildings, which can often contain more pollutants than the air outside. Homes can be full of asthma triggers and allergens that can affect your health.

Mould spores

Mould is a type of fungus which spreads by releasing millions of tiny spores into the air. It is usually found in damp, poorly ventilated areas of homes, such as bathrooms.

What you can do:

- **If you see mould, clean it up carefully with soap and water (it's important to use a face mask).**
- **Fix leaky plumbing or other sources of dampness.**
- **Ventilate: open windows or use extractor fans when cooking or washing dishes, and in the bathroom while showering.**
- **Make sure that damp items are properly dried to avoid mould growth.**
- **Avoid placing furniture right up against colder external walls; space should be left between the wall and furniture to allow air to circulate.**
- **Use a dehumidifier if necessary.**

Did you know?

Children living in damp, mouldy homes are up to three times more likely to experience coughing and wheezing. A recent Cardiff University study found that removing indoor mould can improve asthma symptoms.

Dust mites

House dust mites are tiny spider-like bugs which live in beds, carpets and other soft furnishings. They are present in almost every home, but because they are so small you will be unlikely to see them. They tend to thrive in warm humid conditions.

What you can do:

- Wash bed sheets, blankets and stuffed toys regularly at a high temperature (above 60°C) and dry completely.
- Use mite proof mattress and duvet covers.
- Vacuum carpets, rugs and soft furnishings often using a vacuum cleaner with a mite (HEPA) filter.
- Regularly clean dusty surfaces with a moist cloth.
- Replace rugs and carpets with lino or laminated flooring.

House pets

Pet urine and saliva and dander may also trigger attacks.

What you can do:

- Keep pets outside if possible.
- Bathe cats and dogs regularly with anti-dander shampoo.
- If you have a pet inside, keep them out of the bedroom.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture often to remove dander.



Pests

Pests, such as cockroaches or mice, could trigger asthma attacks.

What you can do:

- **Keep counters, sinks, tables, and floors clean.**
- **Clean dishes, crumbs and spills.**
- **Store food in airtight containers.**
- **Cover rubbish bins.**

Did you know?

The Council provides pest control services for a variety of insect and rodent pests. For advice on pest infestations and how to deal with them and/or to make a pest complaint, call the Environmental Health line and ask to speak to a pest control officer.

Second-hand smoke

Smoking reduces lung function, increases the risk of asthma attacks and can lessen the effectiveness of some asthma medicines. Children and those with asthma are particularly affected by second-hand smoke.

It is also known that children whose mothers smoked while pregnant are more likely to suffer from asthma.

What you can do:

- **Don't smoke in your home or car.**
- **Don't let anyone smoke near your child.**
- **Pledge to make your home and car smokefree.**

Take the Smokefree Homes Pledge

Asthma can be triggered by second-hand smoke. Make a pledge to have a Smokefree home and protect yourself and your children from the dangers of tobacco smoke. Call the Smokefree Homes Officer on **020 7341 5721** for advice and information on how to make your pledge.

Household chemicals

Cleaning products, polishes, air fresheners, pesticides, paints and solvents are potentially toxic chemicals which can trigger an asthma attack and cause other health problems.

What you can do:

- **Ask yourself how many of these products you really need.**
- **Use as little as possible and open windows to ensure ventilation.**
- **Choose cleaner, 'ecological' brands which contain fewer toxins.**
- **Avoid sprays; choose solid or liquid substitutes where possible.**

Outdoor triggers

The outdoor air can contain other pollutants such as ozone, nitrogen dioxide, small dust particles, and pollen.

Traffic fumes and other airborne pollutants can trigger asthma attacks. 66 per cent of people with asthma believe that their symptoms are worsened by traffic pollution.

Being in central London, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's population can be exposed to elevated levels of air pollution.



What you can do:

- **Keep well informed on air pollution levels.**
- **Sign up to AirTEXT (see next page).**
- **Plan your route to avoid polluted roads.**
- **Avoid exercise on days when air pollution is high.**
- **Take extra medication if needed and keep your inhaler with you.**
- **Avoid making short car trips as they add to the pollution; walk or cycle instead.**



Air pollution can harm your health. AirTEXT alerts can help you reduce the effects of pollution on your health and manage your symptoms better.

This is a free service offered by the Council. For more details and to sign up go to www.airtext.info, or call the Council's Environmental Quality Team on 020 7341 5683.



Air Pollution Aware Routes

[walkit.com](http://www.walkit.com)

Air pollution in central London comes mainly from car exhaust fumes and tends to be higher along busier roads. Walkit.com can help you reduce your exposure

to poor air quality by choosing walking routes away from the most polluted areas. See www.walkit.com for more information.

Alternatively, visit the air quality pages on the Council's website:

www.rbkc.gov.uk/EnvironmentalServices/AirQuality/aq_latest_news.asp

Environmental Health Line: **020 7361 3002**

Useful contacts:

Asthma UK advice line:

Tel **0800 121 62 55**

www.asthma.org.uk

Asthma Advice Helpline:

www.asthmaadvicehelpline.co.uk

Kensington and Chelsea Respiratory Nurse Specialist:

Tel **020 8746 8000**

Kensington and Chelsea NHS Stop Smoking Service:

Tel **020 8962 5518**

Health and Safety Executive:

www.hse.gov.uk

Workplace Health and Safety Regulations

For more information on local air pollution visit:

www.rbkc.gov.uk/airquality.

For general advice and to access Council services, call

Environmental Health Line:

020 7361 3002

Smokefree Homes Officer:

020 7341 5721