

# Keeping it Clean: A Healthy House<sup>1</sup>

Mary N. Harrison, Amanda Griffin, and Randall A. Cantrell<sup>2</sup>

The way you clean and maintain your home will affect the health of your family, especially children. The incidence of children diagnosed with asthma is increasing. You can help make your home safe and healthy for your children by eliminating or controlling the risks outlined in this publication.

## Dust and Dust Mites

Dust mites are too small to be seen, but are found in most homes. They live in mattresses, pillows, carpets, fabric-covered furniture, bedding, and stuffed toys. To control them:

- Use dust-proof or plastic-zippered covers over the mattresses and pillows.
- Keep mattresses off the floor by using a bedframe or platform on which to rest them.
- Wash sheets and bedding once a week.
- Keep children's stuffed toys clean, and wash them often.
- Install hard floors if possible. If carpets are used, vacuum them daily in areas where children play and weekly in other areas. (Remember children are often on the floor near carpets and dust.)

## Pets

Our pets' urine, skin flakes, hair, and saliva can trigger asthma and other allergies.

- Keep pets out of the bedroom and other sleeping areas.
- Keep pets off beds and furniture where children sleep.
- Keep pets clean. Bathe them often.
- If practical, keep pets outdoors.
- Keep pets' bedding clean.

## Molds

Mold and mildew are known triggers of respiratory problems. The key to mildew and mold control is moisture control.

- Wash mold/mildew off hard surfaces.
- Fix leaky faucets and other water-supply systems.
- Keep drip pans for air conditioners and refrigerators clean and dry.
- Use exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathrooms when bathing, cooking, or using the dishwasher. If you do not have an exhaust fan, open windows.
- Keep clothing, furnishings, and bathroom dry.

1. This document is FCS5231-01, is one of a series on Home Cleaning and Repairing from the Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension. This material was prepared with the support of the Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Energy Office. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Visit the EDIS Website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>. Original publication date May 2002, first revision December 2005, current revision May 2014.
2. Mary N. Harrison, retired professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension; Amanda Griffin, Extension agent I; UF/IFAS Extension, Jackson County, FL 32884; Randall A. Cantrell, assistant professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

## Pests

Droppings and body parts of pests such as cockroaches and rodents create health problems.

- Dispose of all food scraps and garbage.
- Store food in airtight containers.
- Clean up all spilled crumbs and liquids immediately.
- Try using boric acid for roaches and traps or poison bait for other insects. Keep poisons out of children's reach.
- If sprays must be used, follow instructions on the label.

Be careful to use insecticides and sprays on infected areas only, and avoid breathing them.

## Paint

Paint sometimes peels and is unattractive. It can also be dangerous. If the paint is old (pre 1978), it may contain lead. Extreme care should be used to remove old paint and its dust. If children ingest or breathe lead-based paint, it can lead to severe neurological damage.

## Secondhand Smoke

Research has proven that children and others can be adversely and severely affected by breathing secondhand smoke.

## Household Products

Special precautions should be taken to store cleaning supplies and medicines where they are out of reach of children. Common household products can be toxic for children and can poison them. Keep these and all harmful products stored in such a way that children cannot access them.

**Remember: A healthy family = a healthy home.**