Healthy Housing in Denver

The saying goes, "Home is where the heart is," but home is also where health starts. About 70% of people in the United States spend most of their time at home, making it a very important place to keep safe and healthy.

All types of things make a house a healthy, supportive place for children, adults and pets, including having:

- Clean air and safe drinking water.
- Both clean and green living areas.
- Safe environments, such as lead-free paint, and places to relax and play.

Potential Health Issues Linked to Housing in Denver

Denver is one of the nation's fastest growing cities with limited availability and affordable housing options. As more people move to Denver, it is important that all people keep or gain access to healthy living spaces. Aging houses and unhealthy living spaces can contribute to several health concerns.

- Childhood lead poisoning, injuries, respiratory diseases such as asthma, and quality of life issues have been linked to more than six million substandard housing units nationwide.
- Residents of substandard housing can be at increased risk for fire, electrical injuries, slips and falls, rodent bites and dander, and other illnesses and injuries.
- Other concerning issues may include exposure to pesticide residues, indoor toxicants, tobacco smoke and combustion gases.

Is Unhealthy Housing Affecting Childhood Asthma Rates in Denver?

In Denver, Childhood asthma presents a significant concern for many children. The number of emergency room visits due to asthma varies by neighborhood, and the highest number of asthma-related emergency department visits occurred in predominantly high population density areas. This may be due to differences in:

- Primary care access.
- Disease management.
- Exposure to asthma triggers such as pet dander and dust.
- Secondhand tobacco smoke and overall poor air quality.

Introducing the Healthy Homes Concept

Denver Public Health and Denver Environmental Health (DEH) want to make sure everyone has a healthy and safe home and are working to introduce the "Healthy Homes" concept by developing a comprehensive approach for public health professionals to use to address and reduce exposures to health hazards in housing.
Healthy Homes provides environmental public health practitioners, public health nurses and housing professionals the training and tools they need to address substandard conditions associated with unhealthy and unsafe homes in Denver.

How DEH's Healthy Homes Assessment Is Working to Address Childhood Asthma

DEH considers the house as a comprehensive system and works to identify any potential asthma triggers by visiting families in their homes. Through a partnership with Denver Health Medical Center, (Asthma Trigger Reduction Program) patients with asthma symptoms can be connected to DEH for a possible healthy homes assessment which includes information about combustible appliances, water leaks and infiltration, mold/mildew, chemical irritants in the home, animal dander, rodent problems, proper ventilation, excessive cold areas, etc.

After the assessment is complete, DEH gives the family a report that includes recommendations about how to improve the health of their home.

Common Healthy Home Assessment Recommendations

The most common recommendations DEH makes to families include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Properly installing a furnace filter and scheduling filter changes at least every three months.
- Ensuring adequate and proper ventilation (window or fan) in bathrooms to prevent mold or mold-like growth.
- Properly, and regularly, throwing away trash and sealing all food containers.
- Cleaning, vacuuming, and dusting using green, asthma-friendly products, on a regular basis.

All of the above steps will reduce factors contributing to asthma and other health issues.

What Are We Doing?

- Providing environmental home assessments through Denver Health's Asthma Trigger Reduction Program.
- Offering customized recommendations for residents based on their unique home situation.
- Gathering data and reporting health outcomes associated with housing such as asthma, falls and secondhand smoke.

What Can You Do?

- Consider HUD's Seven Tips for Keeping a Healthy Home.
- Talk with your landlord if you have health concerns about your housing situation. If you have unresolved concerns and live within the City and County of Denver, call DEH at 3-1-1.
- Talk to your doctor about health/asthma issues and a possible referral to DEH's healthy homes program.

About Denver Vital Signs

Published by Denver Public Health and Denver Environmental Health, Denver Vital Signs is a bi-monthly publication on important public health topics for policymakers, public health professionals and interested citizens of Denver County.