

Chemicals and pollutants in the home:

Tips for renters



DO IT FOR...	
	A HEALTHY HOME.

If you rent your home, whether a house, an apartment, or a condominium, there are many things you can do to make your home a healthy one.



What you can do

1 Take off your shoes in your home. When you are outside, your shoes can pick up dirt and harmful chemicals, which you can track into your home.



2 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.

3 Wash your hands with soap and warm, running water for at least 20 seconds before and after touching food, and after using the washroom, changing diapers or touching, feeding or cleaning-up after pets.

- Washing your hands often helps to prevent infection and reduce exposure to harmful substances. In most cases, you don't need antibacterial or antimicrobial soap for safe, effective hand hygiene.



4 Keep dust and dirt away. Clean hard floors and surfaces with a wet cloth or mop to remove dust and dirt. If possible, use a vacuum with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to trap small particles, including dust.

- Exposure to dust and dust mites can cause allergic reactions and trigger pre-existing health conditions such as asthma.

5 Read the label and follow all instructions for safety, usage, and disposal when using household chemical products.

- Never mix household chemical products together. Mixing bleach with other chemicals, especially glass cleaners and products containing ammonia or acids, such as vinegar, can produce harmful gases.
- Look for and understand hazard symbols found on the front of household chemical products.
- 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.
- Call a poison centre or your healthcare provider right away if you suspect someone has been harmed by a household chemical product.

6 Open your windows and doors when outside conditions permit.

- Pay attention to the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI). The AQHI is a scale from 1–10 that measures outdoor air quality. The hottest days of the year are often those with the worst air quality. Further information on the AQHI can be found at www.airhealth.ca.

7 Use an exhaust fan or open your windows when cooking, showering, or using household chemical products, when possible, to help keep your home well ventilated.

8 Check for mould. If you find small amounts of mould, clean them up with dish soap and water. You don't need to use bleach. Exposure to mould can lead to health effects, like eye, nose and throat irritation, and can make asthma symptoms worse.

9 If you are concerned about lead or other metals in your drinking water, **let the tap water run until it's cold before using it for drinking, cooking, or preparing baby food.** This can help reduce the risk of exposure to lead and other metals from your plumbing.

10 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.



Mixing bleach with other chemicals, especially glass cleaners and products containing ammonia or acids, such as vinegar, can produce harmful gases.

- 11 Minimize the use of scented products,** such as plug-in or aerosol deodorizers (air fresheners). These products can hide odours by producing volatile organic compounds (VOCs). VOCs can cause breathing problems, headaches, and irritation to the eyes, nose and throat.

- Reduce the use of candles and incense, as they 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.



Landlord responsibilities

Landlords are legally obligated to ensure that the rental unit follows the rules and regulations pertaining to minimum standards for health, safety, housing and maintenance. Landlord and tenant issues fall under provincial or territorial jurisdiction. Check with your province, territory or municipality, or visit the [Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation \(www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca) to help you understand your rights and responsibilities as a renter.

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. Keep the following in mind:

- 1 Check for mould.**

- If you find large amounts of mould, speak to your landlord. Be sure they fix the underlying cause (water damage, too much humidity or not enough ventilation) to prevent more mould from coming back.
- Keep humidity levels between 30 and 50%, using a humidifier or dehumidifier if necessary. Low humidity may aggravate skin allergies and cause respiratory infections. High humidity can lead to mould.
- Exposure to mould can lead to health effects, like eye, nose and throat irritation and can make asthma symptoms worse.



- 2 Check for Canadian certified smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms.**

- A Canadian certification mark such as CSA, cUL, ULC or cETL, should appear directly on the product.
- Place alarms close to the bedrooms where you can hear the alarm when you sleep.
- Test your smoke and CO alarms regularly. Replace 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.

- 3 Ask your landlord** to have furnaces, fireplaces, gas stoves and water heaters serviced by a trained professional.



Talk to your landlord if you have any concerns about asbestos.

4 Test for radon. Your landlord can do a long-term radon test for three months to measure the level of radon in your home.

- Radon is a radioactive gas that comes from the breakdown of uranium in soil and rock.
- Exposure to radon is the number one cause of lung cancer in non-smokers.

5 Check for lead.

- Homes built before 1991 may have lead-based paint or have base coats of lead-based paint beneath the newer ones.
- Ask your landlord to have the paint tested if you think the paint in your home 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, ask your landlord to hire 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.
- If you live in an older home or neighbourhood, the plumbing system may have lead pipes and lead-based solder. Your landlord or superintendent should be able to help you find this information.

- Lead poisoning 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 children because their bodies are still developing.

6 Talk to your landlord if you have any concerns about asbestos.

- Avoid disturbing asbestos materials yourself as this could increase the risk to your health and your family's health. Before 1990, asbestos was commonly used for insulating and fireproofing homes and was found in other building materials such as ceiling and floor tiles, cement, and plaster.
- 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.
- Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause cancer and other diseases.

**For more information on keeping
a healthy home, please visit**

Canada.ca/healthy-home

  [@HealthyCdns](https://www.instagram.com/HealthyCdns)