



Chemicals and pollutants in the home:

Tips for do-it-yourself (DIY) projects and renovations



DO IT FOR...



A HEALTHY HOME.

Whether you own or rent, there are a range of renovations and DIY projects that you can do to help personalize your home. Before starting any DIY or renovation project, here are some tips to help keep you and your family safe.



Planning

- 1 **Gather the materials and the recommended personal protective equipment needed for your project.**
- 2 **Check for asbestos.** Before 1990, asbestos was commonly used for fireproofing and insulating homes against cold weather and noise. It was found in building materials such as insulation, exterior siding, ceiling and floor tiles, cement and plaster.
 - 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. 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.





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3 Test your home for radon. Radon is a radioactive gas that comes from the breakdown of uranium in soil and rock. Do a long-term radon test for three months to measure the level of radon in your home. The results will help determine whether you need to reduce the radon level in your home. Follow test kit instructions to place the detector in the lowest level of your home (basement or first floor) where you spend at least four hours a day. Exposure to radon is the number one cause of lung cancer in non-smokers.

- If your radon level is high it is best to reduce it before or during renovations. Visit Canada.ca/radon for more information.

4 Check for lead paint. Homes built before 1991 may have lead-based paint or have 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.

5 Check for mould. Inspect your home for visible signs of mould or areas with too much moisture. Look for stains or discolouration 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 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.



Buying

- 1 Consider buying products labelled “low emission” or “low VOC”** as they may give off fewer volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Building materials, like paint, varnish, glues, particle board and composite flooring often have a noticeable smell that comes from emissions containing VOCs. VOCs can cause breathing problems, headaches, and irritation to the eyes, nose and throat.
- 2** If you’re buying something made of composite wood, such as furniture, cabinets, countertops or flooring, **choose composite wood products that have met established formaldehyde limits.** These products will have a “TSCA Title VI compliant” label statement. Formaldehyde is a common VOC.

Working

- 1 Read the label** and follow all instructions for safety, usage, and disposal when using household chemical products.
 - Never mix household chemical products together. Some mixtures, such as bleach and ammonia, can produce harmful gases.
 - Look for and understand hazard symbols found on the front of household chemical products.
 - Call a poison centre or your healthcare provider right away if you suspect someone has been harmed by a household chemical product.
- 2 Wear the recommended personal protective equipment** such as protective clothing, gloves, goggles, and masks, as described on your household chemical products.
- 3 Seal off the work area** to reduce the movement of dust and fumes from the project into other parts of the house.
- 4 Open windows or use exhaust fans** to help keep your home well ventilated during and after projects and renovations. Take fresh air breaks as needed.
- 5** If possible, **keep children, pregnant people, and vulnerable adults away** from work areas.



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Cleaning, storing and disposing

- 1 Clean your home** thoroughly after projects and renovations to remove and limit dust and other particulate matter. 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.
- 2** If the work was particularly dusty, consider **changing the filter** in your furnace.
- 3 Clean brushes**, work clothes, and shoes immediately after working.
- 4 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.
 - When possible, store chemicals, fuel containers and gas-powered equipment in a building not attached to the house (like a shed) to keep you safe from exposure to VOCs. If you live in an apartment or condo, consult with your landlord or condo board.

- 5** Follow municipal guidelines on how to **dispose of household hazardous waste**.
 - Never burn household chemicals products and containers.
 - Don't put chemical products down the drain or flush them down the toilet. Proper disposal will help prevent the contamination of our soil, air and water.



For more information on keeping

a healthy home, please visit

Canada.ca/healthy-home

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



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