



# Healthy Homes

for Expecting Mothers

and Families

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## For Expecting Mothers and Families

You want your child to grow up in a safe and healthy environment, and that means preparing your home for baby's arrival. This booklet shows you some easy ways to make your home safe for your new (and growing!) child.

A healthy start begins before birth, so we'll give you some tips to stay healthy when you're pregnant. And because growing children are more vulnerable to harmful substances, we'll show you how to keep contaminants and pests out of your home.

If you adopt some easy, everyday practices, you'll be on the path to a healthy home during your pregnancy and beyond.

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# Safe Home

Your baby will be exploring the world before you know it, so you want to make sure your home is warm and safe. Because a majority of injuries to children occur in the home, thinking ahead to the toddler years will help you find hazards before your baby does.



## IN THE BEDROOM

In the first few years of life, your baby will spend more time in the bedroom than anywhere else, so you want it to be a safe and comfortable place.

Create a safe zone around your child's crib and changing table by moving them away from lamps, wall decorations, mobiles, windows, and window cords. Otherwise, your child could fall or get tangled up.

### Cribs

Your baby will spend a lot of time in her crib, and you won't always be awake when she is. So it's important to make sure your child's crib is safe, secure, and out of harm's way.

The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission set new crib safety standards in 2010. New cribs have to meet these regulations to be sold in the United States, but if you're considering an older or used crib, make sure it's safe. Most crib-related accidents happen in previously used cribs that don't meet current safety standards.



### Safe Crib Checklist

Make sure your crib has:

#### A firm, tight-fitting mattress

If you can fit two fingers between the mattress and crib, it's not safe.

#### Low corner posts

Clothes can get caught on posts that are higher than the end panels.

#### Narrow gaps between slats

Gaps shouldn't be wider than a soda can; otherwise small heads can get caught.

#### No missing or cracked slats

The mattress should rest on a firm and sturdy base.

#### No pillows, quilts, comforters, sheepskins, pillow-like stuffed toys, and other soft products

#### A solid headboard and footboard

Make sure there are no cutouts, which are a trapping hazard.

## IN THE BATHROOM

Supervision is the key to keeping your child safe. Never leave your child alone in the bathroom. It only takes a few seconds for a child to get into the medicine cabinet or slip on a wet floor. A fall in the bath can lead to serious head injury or drowning, even in very shallow water.

### Safe Bath Checklist

#### Place nonskid mats in the tub and on the floor next to the tub

They'll prevent falls while bathing and slips when getting out.

#### Don't let your child pull on the shower curtain

The curtain could come down or he could lose his balance, causing a fall.

#### Keep water off the floor

Even a small amount of water on the floor can cause a slip.

#### Lock away all medicines and vitamins in a high cabinet, not just prescription drugs

Multivitamins containing iron are poisonous to young children, and minerals, herbal remedies, and other supplements can be harmful, too.

### Safe Bath Checklist Continued...

#### Test bath water with your wrist or elbow

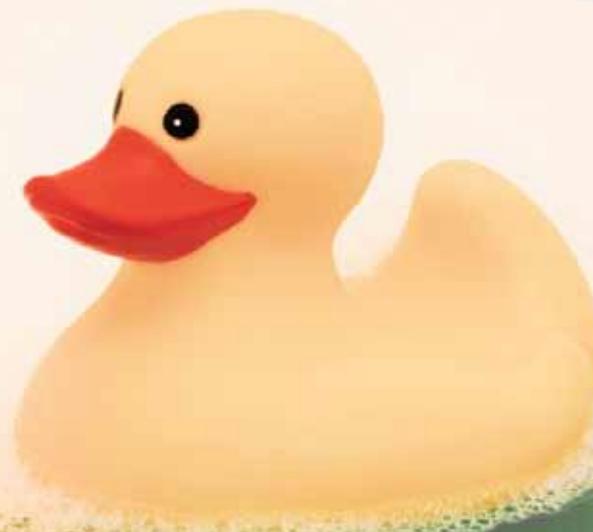
Never put your child in the bath until you're sure it's not too hot.

#### Set your water heater thermostat to 120°F

It only takes three seconds for a child to get a serious burn from hot water. You can also install anti-scalding devices on your faucets.

#### Keep electrical appliances, such as hair dryers and curling irons, away from water

To prevent electrocution, don't keep anything plugged in near the bathtub.





## IN THE KITCHEN

The kitchen is the heart of the home, and families spend a lot of time there. But it's also full of potential dangers for young children. Always store knives and other sharp tools in latched drawers or high cabinets. Also lock up detergents, pesticides, and toxic cleaning products. (See page 27 for safe cleaning alternatives.)

The kitchen might seem like a challenging room to childproof, but adopting a few simple habits will keep your child safe.

### Safe Kitchen Checklist

**Make sure kids can't reach knives, plastic bags, lighters, and matches**

Install safety latches or put hazardous items in high cabinets.

**Turn pot handles toward the back of the stove**

Keep curious hands away from hot liquids and heavy pans.

**Keep hot liquids and foods away from the edges of tables and counters**

They could fall on children and cause burns or serious injury.

**Don't hold a child while cooking at the stove**

Squirming children can be distracting, and they could get splattered by hot cooking oil or water.

**Don't give young children hard, round foods**

Kids can choke on hard candies, nuts, grapes, popcorn, carrots, and raisins.

**Keep children away from hot tap water**

It only takes three seconds for scalding water to cause a burn.

## AROUND THE HOUSE

Your baby will be crawling before you know it, and you want to make sure your home is a safe place for him or her to grow and explore. You'd be surprised at how easy it is for your baby to get into trouble in any room of the house!

### Safe Home Checklist

#### Use safety gates to block stairways

Get a gate with a straight slat design instead of the older accordion style, which can be a trapping hazard.

#### Cover electrical outlets with safety plugs

Take extra precaution because plug-in caps could end up in your child's mouth. Consider replacing the outlet with one that includes a sliding safety hatch.

#### Secure heavy bookcases, dressers, and appliances

Bolt whatever you can to the wall. Every year thousands of children are injured when televisions and other furniture tip over on them.

#### Close drawers when you're not using them

Open drawers are a tempting climbing ladder for toddlers.

### Safe Home Checklist Continued...

#### Keep children away from windows

Most falls from windows involve children younger than age 5. Install window guards, too, but not on windows with fire escapes.

#### Install smoke alarms in every room of the house

Test all smoke alarms at least once a month, and change the batteries every year.

#### Learn first aid and CPR

Everyone who cares for small children should learn CPR. Choking and suffocation are the most common causes of preventable death in children younger than 12 months old.

#### Keep an updated list of emergency telephone numbers next to every phone in your home

The numbers should include local poison control, your family doctor, and the hospital emergency room.



## GARDENING AND PESTICIDES

Gardening is a great way to get fresh air and stay active while you're pregnant. And it's perfectly safe as long as you take a few simple precautions. Always drink plenty of water, protect your skin from the sun, and don't overexert yourself, especially when it comes to heavy lifting.

There are two issues pregnant women should be particularly aware of when gardening: diseases that can be transmitted to people through the feces of birds and animals, especially cats; and chemical pesticides, which can trigger abnormal hormonal responses, impair reproductive activity, and cause cancer.

### Safe Gardening Checklist

Wear rubber-coated gloves

Wash your hands thoroughly after working in the garden

Don't touch your eyes, face, or mouth before washing your hands

Use organic fertilizers and pesticides on your lawn and garden

*Because children and pets are typically exposed to garden chemicals through their lungs and skin, teach them not to put their hands in their mouths, and make sure they wash their hands after playing outside.*

## SWIMMING POOLS

Swimming pools are a great place for families to spend time together and have fun. Remember to stay close, be alert, and watch children at all times. Most pool accidents are preventable, so if you have a pool—or if you're visiting a community pool—keep your family safe by adopting some proven water safety tips.

### Safe Pool Checklist

**Don't leave children alone around a pool**

A child can drown in the time it takes to answer the telephone.

**If a child goes missing in your home, check the pool first**

Every second counts when a child is submerged in water.

**Build a fence around your pool**

It should be at least four feet tall and have a self-closing and self-latching gate.

**Install pool and gate alarms**

The alarm will sound when children (or others) are in the pool or pool area.

**Don't allow food or chewing gum around the pool**

Choking prevention is especially important around water.

# Contaminants

Contaminants are potentially harmful substances that can enter your home through the water supply, through the air, or even be contained in your walls. Some contaminants, such as carbon monoxide and lead, can be passed from a mother to her developing child during pregnancy.

Hazardous substances pose an even greater risk to small children than adults because contaminants that they ingest or inhale are more readily absorbed by their developing bodies. Contaminants can harm their brains, lungs, and reproductive systems because these organs are still developing.

## LEAD

Lead is an element that was often used in paint and pipes in homes built before 1978. Lead exposure can harm a child's brain, nervous system, blood cells, and kidneys. It can also cause learning and developmental disabilities. If you're pregnant, you should limit exposure to lead because it can pass through your body to your child.

### Lead Checklist

#### Wipe down surfaces

Gently wipe doorframes, banisters, stairs, railings, porches, fences, windowsills, and walls with a damp paper towel. Throw out the towel when you're done.

#### Run the cold water for three minutes

Flush out potential built-up lead whenever you haven't used the water for several hours.

#### Don't scrape, sand, or burn any substance that contains lead

It will only disperse the lead further.

*If you have flaking or damaged lead paint in your home, don't try to remove it yourself. You're risking your health and your child's health, and you may end up spreading even more lead around your home. Hire a contractor that is certified in lead removal.*

## IN THE AIR

Exposure to common airborne contaminants such as radon, carbon monoxide, and asbestos can lead to lung cancer, asthma, and other illnesses.

Airborne contaminants such as radon, mercury, and certain pesticides accumulate at ground level. Because small children spend a lot of time on the floor and ground, they have a greater risk of harmful exposure than adults.

### Safe Air Checklist

#### Buy a radon detection kit

If you have radon, hire a contractor to install a basement vent that will remove it from your house.

#### Install carbon monoxide detectors

Place them within 15 feet of every sleeping area. Evacuate the house if the alarm goes off.

#### Have a professional inspect your HVAC system

Carbon monoxide is produced when fuel is burned in a furnace or other heating system, and it can build up in your home.

#### Look for and remove asbestos

If your home was built before the 1970s, it probably has asbestos insulation. Only certified professionals should remove asbestos.

## VOCs

Everybody knows the smell of a new carpet, but did you know the source of that smell could cause health problems? Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are chemicals that are released from a variety of household products, including carpets, paints, cleaning supplies, aerosol sprays, and glues and adhesives.

Exposure to VOCs can cause headaches, nausea, dizziness, and ear, nose, and throat irritation. Long-term exposure to VOCs can also lead to serious health problems, including cancer.

### VOC Checklist

#### Don't paint when you're pregnant

Ask someone else to do the painting, and use fans to bring in fresh air.

#### Ventilate rooms before moving back in

If you're painting or installing new carpet, open the windows and air out the rooms thoroughly.

#### Look for low-VOC paints and cleaning products

They're less harmful and the odor is not as strong.

## IN THE WATER

Most people get their water from a public utility that purifies it before it reaches their homes. Still, your drinking water can be contaminated, potentially causing serious illnesses. If you're concerned about your water's content, request a report from your utility. Look for these contaminants:

**Bacteria and viruses** in drinking water may cause upset stomach, diarrhea, or more serious illnesses.

**Nitrate** gets into water from animal and human waste and from fertilizer. In babies younger than 6 months, nitrate can cause a serious condition called blue baby syndrome. If your baby develops a blue or purple-colored face, see a doctor right away.

**Lead and copper** can get into water from your pipes. Too much lead can cause learning and behavior problems in children, as well as other illnesses. Copper can cause colic in babies and upset stomachs or diarrhea in older children and adults.

**Pesticides, gas, and oil** can seep into the ground and get into drinking water, causing damage to the kidneys, liver, or other organs. Studies have linked prolonged exposure to agricultural pesticides with birth defects, pregnancy complications, and miscarriage. Also, exposure during the first year of life can lead to an increased risk for asthma.



# MOISTURE

Moisture in your home can lead to mold, dust mites, roaches, rats, and mice because they all thrive in damp environments. They also produce allergens that aggravate asthma and other chronic respiratory conditions.

You can reduce the health risks to your growing family by making your home more energy efficient. A tightly sealed, well-insulated, and ventilated home is more protected from condensation, which can damage wood and promote mold growth. It also leaves fewer entry points for dust, insects, rodents, and other pests.



## Moisture Checklist

### Fix leaky pipes

Check sinks and showerheads, under the dishwasher, and behind the washing machine and refrigerator for leaks and water damage.

### Fix leaks in your roof

Moisture in your attic can lead to rotting wood and promote mold growth.

### Caulk cracks in windows and weather-strip doorframes

Openings allow water to leak into your home. Filling cracks also helps control moisture and temperature and means less movement of dust and contaminants.

# Mold

Mold is the common word for a fungus on wood, food, or paper. Mold has the potential to irritate your lungs and trigger allergies. For their size, infants breathe more air than adults, so a mold problem could be worse for them. If you or your child has a sore throat, skin rash, difficulty breathing, or a bloody nose, it could be caused by mold.

Look for mold in these places:

- Wet clothes
- Basements
- Attics
- Concrete foundations
- Tubs
- Sinks
- Toilets
- Drywall, insulation, or anywhere damaged by flooding

If you or anyone in your home has asthma, mold could make your symptoms worse or cause an asthma attack.

*If you see mold growing on drywall, studs, or subflooring—especially if the area exceeds 10 square feet—you should call a professional. Find a mold removal specialist in the yellow pages under “Fire and Water Damage Restoration.”*

## **Mold Prevention Checklist**

### **Make sure sinks and tubs are draining**

Standing water promotes mold growth.

### **Dry clothes thoroughly**

If you fold damp clothes, they won't dry as quickly and mold will start to grow.

### **Caulk cracks in windows and weather-strip doorframes**

Openings allow water to leak into your home. Filling cracks also helps control moisture and temperature and means less movement of dust and contaminants.

### **Clean the bathroom regularly**

Mold and water go hand in hand, so scrub the toilet, sink, fixtures and anywhere water can collect.

### **Run an exhaust fan while showering**

Exhaust fans help get rid of moisture in the bathroom. Make sure your fans vent to the outside, so moisture isn't trapped in another part of your house.

### **Clean up spills and puddles immediately**

You'll prevent mold growth and keep pests away.

## **Safe Cleaning Recipes**

### **Natural Mold Fighter**

2 cups water

3 drops tea tree essential oil

*Mix in a spray bottle. Spray your walls once a week and wipe dry.*

# Cleaning Products

In general, household cleaning products are safe when used as directed as long as you limit your exposure. But frequent use can be harmful, especially in poorly ventilated rooms. And the dangers are more serious for infants and young children. When they're around, you should consider less harmful alternatives.

Look for the EPA's Design for the Environment label to make sure you're using cleaning products that are safe for you and your young child.



## Safe Cleaning Recipes

Safe cleaning products are a good way to protect you and your child.

### Window Cleaner

3 tablespoons distilled vinegar  
2 cups water

*Mix in a spray bottle.*

### All Purpose Cleaner

1 cup water  
3 drops of natural soap  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1 tablespoon distilled white vinegar

*Mix in a spray bottle.*

### Toilet Cleaner

Drizzle the toilet bowl with vinegar or lemon juice. Sprinkle on some baking soda and let sit for 10 minutes before scrubbing with a toilet brush.

*Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Design for the Environment*

# Pests

You don't want to bring your baby into a home infested with pests. Insects and rodents can trigger allergies and spread disease. Because pests seek out food and hiding places, the most important thing you can do is keep your home clean and clutter-free.



## RODENTS

Mice and rats can carry diseases such as rat bite fever, a bacterial infection caused by mouse and rat bites; and hantavirus, which is carried through mouse and rat waste and can be inhaled by humans.

Look for these signs of rodents in your house:

- Gnawed wood or electrical cords
- Droppings
- Nests
- Scampering noises

## Rodent-Free Checklist

### Reduce clutter

Pests seek out hiding places, so clean up piles of clothes and papers.

### Eliminate all water and food sources

If you get rid of their food source, pests will go away. Don't forget pet dishes and bird feeders.

### Keep all food (pet and human) in airtight containers

If pests can't smell food, they'll look elsewhere. Seal unused food and put it away in the fridge or in cupboards.

### Get a family house cat

If nobody in your family has allergies, a cat can help keep mice out of your house.

Rodent traps can help eliminate an infestation in your home. Set traps at night and check them regularly. Otherwise, animals could learn to avoid the traps when they see other animals caught in them. And don't set traps or poison where young children can get to them.



## INSECTS

The most common insects you'll encounter in your home are dust mites, cockroaches, fleas, and ticks. Many people suffer from dust mite allergies, which are similar to hay fever. Cockroach droppings are harmful to people with asthma.

## Insect-Free Checklist

### Clean and vacuum regularly

Carpeting and upholstered furniture are ideal environments for dust mites and fleas.

### Wash bedding once a week

Use hot water to kill dust mites, fleas, and ticks.

### Eliminate food sources

Put food away, and clean up spills immediately.

### Call an exterminator

If you can't handle an infestation on your own, call a professional.

Chemical pesticides can help control insect and rodent problems when used properly, but they can also be harmful to people. Pregnant women shouldn't handle chemical pesticides and shouldn't use aerosol bombs.



# RESOURCES

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Healthy Homes**  
[www.cdc.gov/healthyhomes](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyhomes)

**National Center for Healthy Housing**  
[www.nchh.org](http://www.nchh.org)

**The National Women's Health Information Center**  
[www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)

**U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission: Carbon Monoxide**  
[www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/466.html](http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/466.html)

**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development:  
Making Homes Healthier for Families**  
[www.hud.gov/offices/lead/healthyhomes/index.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/lead/healthyhomes/index.cfm)

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Aging Initiative**  
[www.epa.gov/aging/resources/factsheets/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/aging/resources/factsheets/index.htm)

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Design for the Environment**  
[www.epa.gov/dfe/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/dfe/index.htm)

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Indoor Air Quality**  
[www.epa.gov/iaq/index.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/index.html)

For more information about Keys to a Healthy Home, visit  
[www.keystoahealthyhome.com](http://www.keystoahealthyhome.com)

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