

# Creating Healthy Environments for **KIDS**



Toxic substances are common in our environment, both indoors and out. Harmful chemicals that stick to dust, fumes from cleaning and renovation products, chemicals in plastics, mercury in fish—all of these can have serious impacts on the health of children. The good news is that parents can take some simple steps—beyond what they already do—to reduce risks in the home.

Children are at greater risk than adults because their natural defences are not fully developed. Babies and toddlers also explore the world with their hands and mouths, which exposes them more to harmful substances. This guide will help parents protect their kids by offering tips for “environmental childproofing.”

canadian partnership for  
**children's**  
health & environment



partenariat canadien pour la santé  
**des enfants**  
et l'environnement

[www.healthy  
environment  
forkids.ca](http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca)



# SAFE at home

5 THINGS YOU CAN DO  
TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY



**Want to create a healthy home environment for your children, but don't know where to begin? Here are five areas where you can make an immediate impact with simple actions—without spending a lot of money.**



## Bust that dust

- House dust is one of the main sources of children's exposure to toxic substances, most of which come from normal wear-and-tear on consumer products.
- Clean with a good quality vacuum, or simply a damp cloth or wet mop. (Dry dusting just circulates the dust back into the air.) Vacuum or wet-mop once a week; twice a week if you have a crawling child.
- Take your shoes off at the door to minimize the amount of dirt brought inside. Use washable entrance mats, and launder them separately from clothing.
- Reduce the amount of dust in the home by minimizing clutter and by storing toys in closed containers.



## Go green when you clean

- Wash your hands often, using regular soap and warm water: doctors recommend against using antibacterial soaps.
- Use non-toxic cleaning products. Baking soda is a good scouring powder for sinks and tubs, and vinegar mixed with water works well for windows, surfaces and floors. You don't need to use bleach for most cleaning tasks.
- Don't use air "fresheners." Also, choose fragrance-free laundry detergents, and avoid using dryer sheets. The fragrances (or "parfum") in these products can contain potentially harmful chemicals.
- Avoid dry cleaning, or find a cleaner that uses non-toxic methods.
- And, of course, keep all cleaners and other household chemicals out of the reach of children.



## Renovate right

- Children and pregnant women should stay away from areas being renovated, to avoid being exposed to potentially harmful substances.
- Control and contain all dust. Seal off the rest of the house from the renovation site with plastic sheeting and duct tape and close heating and cooling vents. Particularly in older homes (built before 1978), renovation dust can contain high levels of lead, which is toxic to the developing brain.
- Choose less toxic paints, finishes and glues. Look for products labeled "VOC-free," "zero-VOC" or "low-VOC." Open the windows and use fans to bring in fresh air during and after use of these products.
- Keep your work clothes and shoes in a separate hamper, or in a shed or garage. Wash them separately from other laundry.



## Get drastic with plastic

- Don't use plastic containers or plastic wrap in the microwave, even if the packaging says "microwave-safe." Harmful chemicals can move from the plastic into food and drinks.
- Store food in glass or ceramic containers, rather than plastic.
- When heating milk, use a non-plastic container. When the liquid has cooled to lukewarm, transfer it to bottles.
- Eat fresh or frozen foods whenever possible to reduce exposure to BPA, a chemical used in the lining of most food and drink cans.
- Avoid teething toys, bibs, bath toys, shower curtains and other items that contain PVC or vinyl (a type of soft plastic). These items can contain harmful chemicals called phthalates, which were banned in children's toys in June 2011.



## Dish safer fish

- Choose varieties of fish that are low in mercury, a chemical that is harmful to the brain. Healthier choices include Atlantic mackerel, herring, rainbow trout, wild or canned salmon, and tilapia.
- If you eat canned tuna, look for "light" varieties, as these are lower in mercury than albacore or "white" tuna.
- If you catch sport fish in local waters, check your province's or territory's advisories to see whether it is safe to eat.



**Focusing on these five "hot spots" is a great start. For more on keeping your children safe, visit:**

[www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca](http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca)

**See over for safe pregnancy tips >>**

## BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

Chemicals in dust and cleaning products or mercury in fish may not make your children look or feel sick. But exposure to small amounts of toxic substances can have long-term, often subtle effects on the developing brain, lungs, and reproductive system of a fetus or young child. Scientists still don't understand all of these effects. However, when it comes to children's health, it is better to be safe than sorry. Small amounts of harmful substances can add up. But so can your efforts to reduce everyday exposures, by following simple environmental childproofing tips like the "top 5" inside.



## HEAD START: *Tips for a healthy pregnancy*

Pregnant women can do many things to promote the healthy development of their babies, including avoiding tobacco smoke and alcohol. Expectant mothers and their families can also take steps to reduce exposure to certain harmful substances often found in the home. Scientific evidence shows that exposure, during pregnancy, to pollution and toxic chemicals in products can be harmful to child health and development. Here's how you can reduce the risks:

- Avoid exposure to paint fumes, renovation dust and certain building materials that can have harmful effects during pregnancy.
- Eat a healthy diet. Getting enough calcium, for example, can reduce the amount of lead your body absorbs.
- Avoid changing vacuum bags or emptying the bin of a central vac when you're pregnant: household dust can contain many harmful substances. Don't ask children to do this chore, either.
- Choose fish that are low in mercury, minimize risk of food poisoning by not eating raw fish, and follow local fish advisories.
- Avoid using harsh, strong-smelling cleaning products when pregnant, especially those with hazard symbols on the label. These have been linked to wheezing and asthma in children once they reach preschool age. Some also contain chemicals that can affect the body's hormones.

**Breast is best! Experts agree that breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for babies and their mothers. While you're breastfeeding, make sure you get plenty of rest and eat a healthy diet low in animal fats.**

**For more environmental childproofing information and tips, visit:**

[www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca](http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca)



The Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment (CPCHE) is a collaboration of environmental, public health, child care, and physician organizations that have been working together since 2001 to advance protection of children's health from toxic chemicals and pollution. We aim to raise public awareness and empower individual action, while at the same time calling upon government and businesses to adopt more protective policies and practices. Together, we can create healthier environments for kids.

This project has received funding support from the Government of Ontario. Such support does not indicate endorsement by the Government of Ontario of the contents of this material.

Printed in Canada on 100% post-consumer recycled paper. June 2011. Ce document est également disponible en français.

canadian partnership for  
**children's**  
health & environment



partenariat canadien pour la sante  
**des enfants**  
et l'environnement