



# Let your kids live well with asthma and allergies this winter - reduce hidden household allergy triggers

Ahead of World Allergy Week 2018 (22 to 28 April 2018) National Asthma Council Australia has words of advice for parents to help protect kids with asthma and allergies against symptoms in the colder months.

“Allergies are often seen as a spring and summer affliction,” says Adele Taylor, Program Manager, Sensitive Choice® at the National Asthma Council Australia, “but there are hidden household winter triggers too”.

“Many areas of Australia experience mould problems following heavy rain, and there is an annual autumn indoor house dust mite population spike. Dust mites are tiny microscopic creatures that can get into beds and soft furnishings like your couch or carpet, potentially causing a lot of problems for someone with asthma or an allergy. “

Studies at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research in Sydney show that dust mite levels can increase two to three-fold during late autumn, compared with summer levels. Whilst dust mite levels can then decline over winter, people with allergies often come into closer contact with the source.

House dust mites are the world’s most common allergy-causing protein, with up to 1.2 billion people displaying some allergy to mites. Exposure can cause symptoms such as sneezing, asthma symptoms, and red and watery eyes. Rugs, doonas and woollen underlays, soft toys and long-stored woollen clothing are all breeding grounds for dust mites and tend to be used more during the winter months.

“When the weather turns cold, people and pets tend to stay indoors more often. This can increase the amount of pet dander in your home. Turning on the heater can cause mildew and mould to circulate through the air vents, “added Ms Taylor.

“More than seven million Australians have allergies, including asthma, hay fever, allergic conjunctivitis and eczema,” says Associate Professor Sheryl Van Nunen, The University of Sydney- Northern.

“If your children are spending more time indoors during the colder weather, you might notice an increase in their allergy symptoms, such as sneezing, wheezing, and itchy, watery eyes.”

“To reduce their symptoms, parents should learn about what triggers their children’s asthma and allergies, and work on reducing their exposure to these triggers in their living environments.”

She urged parents not to wait for their kids’ allergy symptoms to start, but to speak to their doctor or pharmacist, take prescribed medications and create an allergy-free home environment before winter hits.

The latest statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that hospitalisations for children with asthma peak in late autumn and early winter.

Follow these tips so that your child can live better with asthma and/or allergies this winter:

- If your child has allergies keep them away from the room you're cleaning as dust or animal hair could be stirred up and set them off.
- Wash sheets, pillowcases and soft toys in the bedroom weekly in water hotter than 55°C.
- Consider specific strategies to tackle your child's individual triggers, such as dust mite covers on bedding.
- Use a damp or electrostatic cloth to dust hard surfaces (including floors).
- Consider using a vacuum cleaner with an asthma and allergy sensitive HEPA filter.
- Watch out for mould and condensation and air the house regularly.
- Clean the filters on your air-conditioning/heater units.
- Keep pets out of your child's bedroom and off carpets, rugs and soft furnishings.
- Don't assume a child's sniffles are the result of cold viruses.

Another way to manage allergy symptoms is to use products that may reduce allergy triggers in day to day life. National Asthma Council created Sensitive Choice® to help consumers identify asthma and allergy aware products. Assessed by an independent panel, Sensitive Choice® products have a blue butterfly on packaging, including bedding, cleaning products, vacuum cleaners and more.

Australia has one of the highest incidences of allergy in the world, with more than four million people affected. One in ten Australians has asthma and one in three has allergies.

To help you identify and tackle the hidden triggers in your home, Sensitive Choice has a series of 12 one-minute Healthy Homes videos available. If your child has allergy symptoms, visit the Sensitive Choice® website [www.sensitivechoice.com](http://www.sensitivechoice.com) for products and services that may be a better choice for you and your family.

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Source: <https://woolcock.org.au/new-2/bed-not-the-enemy-for-wheezy-asthmatics-study>

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