



*Live, Play and Learn.*

# What you can do!

An Environmental Health Guide for  
*First Nations Youth*



Information about environmental  
health issues and tips on how to make  
changes inside your home.



Government of Canada  
Gouvernement du Canada

Canada

LEAD

Indoor Air

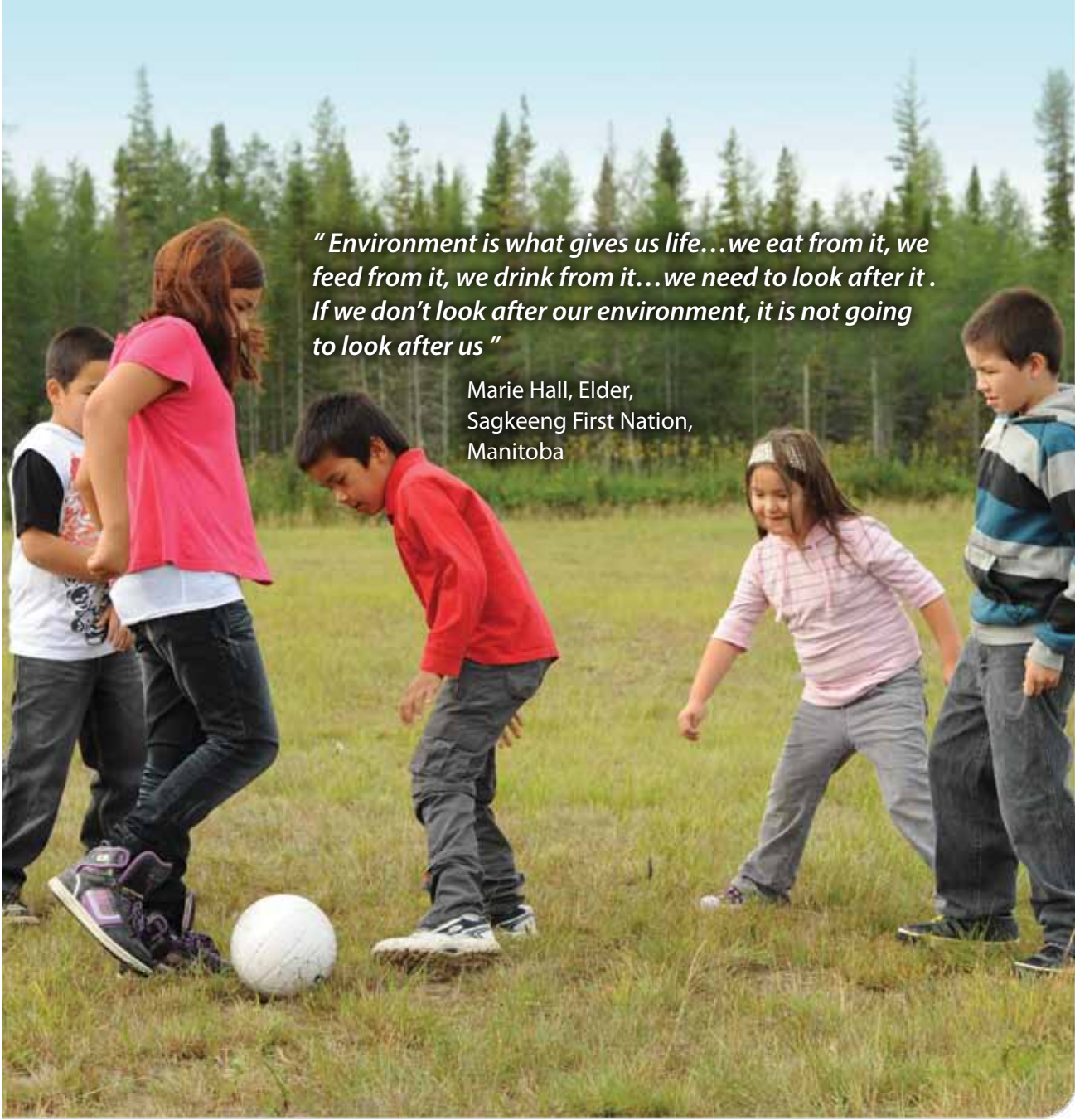
Drinking Water

PESTICIDES

CHEMICAL PRODUCTS

Noise

Looking for Health Risks

A group of five children are playing soccer in a grassy field. A girl in a pink shirt is about to kick a white ball. A boy in a red shirt is in a ready position. Other children are watching. The background is a dense forest of evergreen trees under a clear sky.

*"Environment is what gives us life...we eat from it, we feed from it, we drink from it...we need to look after it. If we don't look after our environment, it is not going to look after us"*

Marie Hall, Elder,  
Sagkeeng First Nation,  
Manitoba



## *Live, Play and Learn.*

When most people think about the environment, they think of nature, but really, the environment is all around you. It's where you live, where you play and where you learn. Your environment is inside, outside and even under your bed!

Sometimes there are things in your environment that could be harmful to you. Things like lead, pesticides and moulds can get in the air, your food, your water and the places you play. If this happens you could get sick. Luckily there are lots of things you can do to help make sure your home is a safe place for you and your family.

This guide will help you understand environmental contaminants and how they could impact your health. Plus there are lots of great tips that you can do to help out!

Check out the ***First Nations Environmental Health Guide – Your Health at Home*** which has even more information so your whole family can do their part to make sure your home is a healthy environment.



**Learn more on what you  
can do about:**

### **LEAD**

**Indoor Air**

*Drinking Water*

### **PESTICIDES**

**CHEMICAL PRODUCTS**

**Noise**

**Looking for Health Risks**



# LEAD

## Where can I find lead in my home or community?

Lead is a metal found naturally in the earth's crust, which can be added to certain products. You can be exposed to lead in your home and community through dust and in some of these other common items that can contain lead:

- Old paint, like on walls and furniture
- Bullets and shotgun pellets
- Fishing weights
- Water from old pipes
- Older play equipment
- Some toys
- Solder used for welding

## How can lead be harmful to my body?

Even though lead is found in nature, exposure to lead can make you feel sick. If you're exposed to it for a long period of time it could affect your behavior, your concentration and even cause high blood pressure when you get older. Lead can also prevent the calcium in your body from keeping your bones strong.



**TIPS – WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

How can I prevent lead from getting into my drinking water and my body?

- Use only COLD tap water for drinking, cooking and if you are making baby formula. Hot water may contain more contaminants like lead.
- Run the cold water tap BEFORE using it – first thing in the morning or any other time the tap has not been used for a few hours.
- Wash your hands A LOT to help protect you from exposure to lead and prevent other possible infections.
  - Before you eat
  - After you play outside
  - If you touch bullets or fishing weights
  - After going to the bathroom
  - After you play with animals
- Help clean up the dust in your home by using a vacuum cleaner, a wet mop or duster. Even under your bed!
- Take your shoes off or wipe them well when you come in the home.



**WHERE DOES THE  
LEAD GO ONCE IT  
GETS INTO MY BODY?  
MOST OF IT GOES  
INTO YOUR BONES,  
WHERE IT STAYS  
FOR A LONG TIME.**



# Indoor Air

## What is an indoor air pollutant?

When people think about air pollution, they usually think about smog and other forms of outdoor air pollution. But air pollution can also be inside, like in your home and school.

Since we spend most of our time indoors, indoor air pollution can greatly affect our health. There are many types of indoor air pollutants but fortunately, there are steps you can do to avoid the health effects associated with them.



## Indoor Air

DID YOU KNOW WE  
SPEND CLOSE TO  
90% OF OUR TIME  
INDOORS!



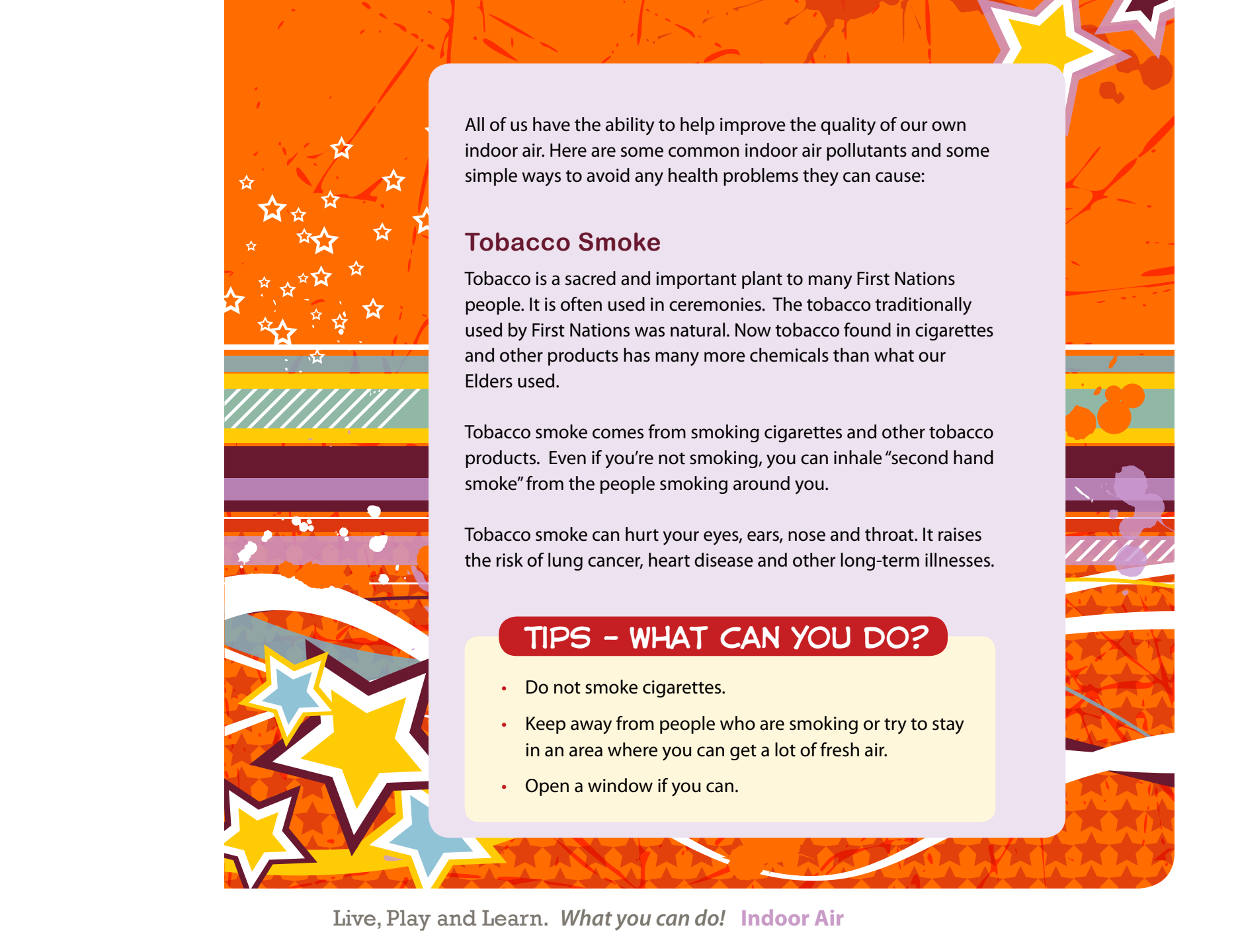
### How can indoor air pollutants affect me?

We get oxygen into our bodies by breathing air into our lungs. If the air has chemicals and other pollutants floating around, you could breathe them in.

Health effects from indoor air pollution can appear immediately or show up after many years of repeated contact.



Indoor Air



All of us have the ability to help improve the quality of our own indoor air. Here are some common indoor air pollutants and some simple ways to avoid any health problems they can cause:

## Tobacco Smoke

Tobacco is a sacred and important plant to many First Nations people. It is often used in ceremonies. The tobacco traditionally used by First Nations was natural. Now tobacco found in cigarettes and other products has many more chemicals than what our Elders used.

Tobacco smoke comes from smoking cigarettes and other tobacco products. Even if you're not smoking, you can inhale "second hand smoke" from the people smoking around you.

Tobacco smoke can hurt your eyes, ears, nose and throat. It raises the risk of lung cancer, heart disease and other long-term illnesses.

### TIPS – WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Do not smoke cigarettes.
- Keep away from people who are smoking or try to stay in an area where you can get a lot of fresh air.
- Open a window if you can.



### Mould

Mould can form anywhere that gets a lot of water or moisture. That means mould could be found in your house, school or daycare if there is dampness.

Mould can cause allergic reactions like sneezing, coughing, wheezing and sore, itchy or red eyes.

### TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Do what you can to make sure water and moisture doesn't collect in your house:

- Turn on the fan or open a window when having a shower.
- If you have a fan above your stove, turn it on when you're boiling water.
- Keep an eye out for water damage and mould in your home. Tell an adult if you see any!





## Carbon Monoxide(CO)

Carbon Monoxide is a harmful gas that is made more dangerous because it has no colour, smell or taste – it could be in the air and you would not even know it! Carbon Monoxide can make it difficult to breathe, cause heart disease, headaches, confusion and even death.

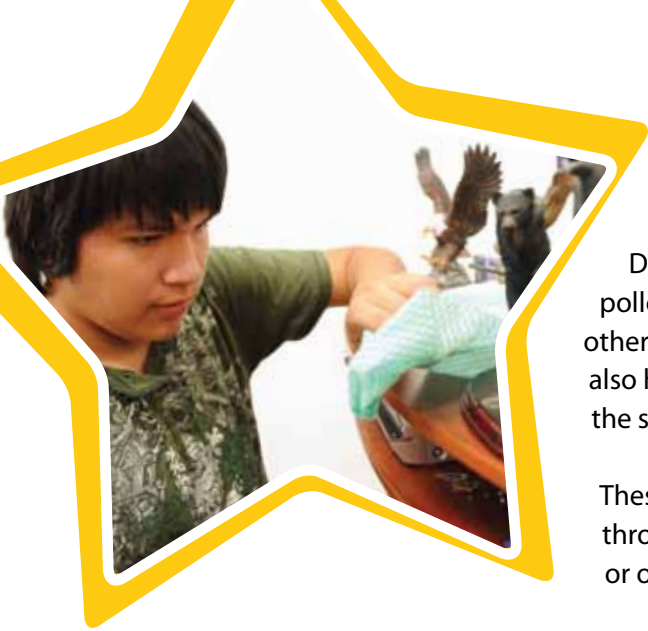
Carbon Monoxide can build up in the air if you are using unvented kerosene and gas space heaters, gas water heaters, gas stoves, wood stoves and fireplaces. Anything that runs on gasoline can emit CO. This includes gas powered generators and the exhaust from cars and snowmobiles. Carbon Monoxide also is in tobacco smoke, so be sure to follow the Tobacco Smoke Tips.

### TIPS – WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Remind adults:

- To never use barbecues or outdoor stoves indoors.
- Not to use kerosene lamps, oil lamps or space heaters inside unless they are for the indoors.
- To get a Carbon Monoxide detector and make sure it works.





### Dust, Dust Mites and Pollen

Dust in your home or school can contain pollen, tiny bugs called mites and many other things that cause allergies. Dust can also have bits of chemicals or metals from the soil and environment outside.

These things can irritate your nose and throat, cause allergies and make asthma or other breathing problems worse.

### TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- When you come in from outside, take off your shoes or wipe your feet well.
- Help the adults with the dusting by using a wet rag and a vacuum.
- Always follow the directions when using cleaning products and make sure you're in an area that has lots of fresh air.



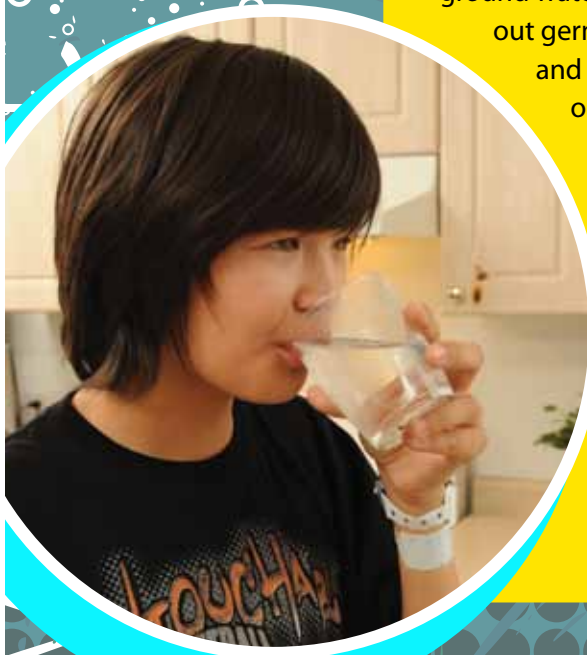
# Drinking Water

## Where does my drinking water come from?

The water you get from your faucet can come from different places – from lakes, rivers or melted ice (surface water), or from wells (groundwater). Normally, ground water naturally cleans itself because the top soil acts as a filter keeping out germs and chemicals. But sometimes our surface water, groundwater and even our water tanks aren't always clean enough. Sometimes our drinking water can still get contaminated. When that happens we have to treat the water before we drink it so we don't get sick.

## How can drinking water harm my body?

If you drink contaminated water you can get sick with stomach problems called gastro-intestinal infection. You may also have nausea and vomiting.





# Drinking Water

## TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There are many small things you can do to protect yourself in a big way!

- If your home uses well water, remind the adults that your well should be tested for bacteria at least once a year.
- If your community receives a *Boil Water Advisory/Order*, you must boil any water you use for drinking, cooking, making ice cubes, washing food, and brushing your teeth. This should be a rolling boil for at least one minute. Help remind younger children not to drink the water during these advisories/orders.
- Do not drink water directly from a rubber hose, especially if the hose has been in the sun all day. The rubber can break down and leak toxic chemicals.
- Water from lakes, rivers, streams and ponds may contain harmful bacteria. Make sure you don't drink the water unless it's been treated.

**60% OF YOUR  
BODY IS WATER!**

Drinking Water

# PESTICIDES

## What are pesticides?

Insects, arachnids (spiders, ticks, lice) and rodents (rats and mice) all have a role to play in nature, but they can hurt people by biting, stinging, and carrying disease. They could also damage food and other things in your garden or your home.

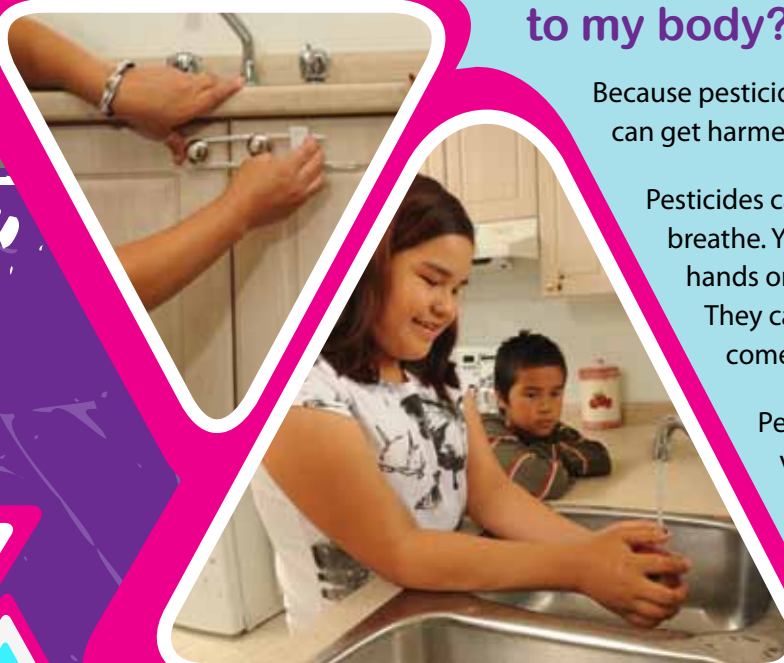
Pesticides are used to control pests like insects, arachnids and rodents. Pesticides can get into your home from the food you buy or if you use them in or around your home.

## How can pesticides be harmful to my body?

Because pesticides kill or control pests, it's possible others can get harmed as well, especially children and pets.

Pesticides can enter your body through your lungs when you breathe. You could also swallow them if you don't wash your hands or your fruits and vegetables properly before eating. They can also enter your body through your skin if you come in contact with them.

Pesticides can irritate your skin and eyes, cause vomiting and dizziness. In the worst cases, they can permanently damage your body or even cause cancer. There are lots of ways to help make sure pesticides don't hurt you!

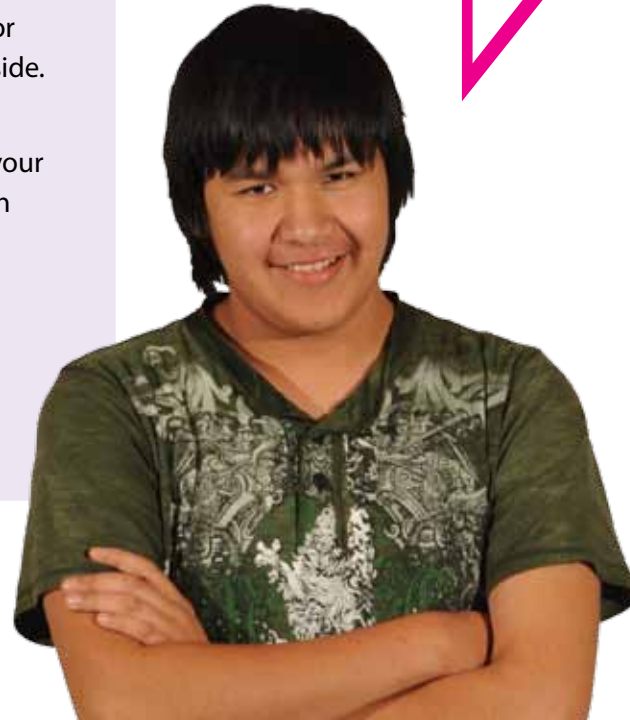


## TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

How can I prevent pesticides from getting into my body?

- Make sure you ask the adults in your house to keep pesticides in their original container and stored in a locked cabinet or in a place that babies and younger kids can't reach.
- Check out other ways of getting rid of pests without pesticides. If they have to be used, ask the adults to read the label and follow the instructions carefully.
- Never run or play on lawns or go into the garden if they have recently been sprayed with pesticides. Make sure you keep your pets away too!
- Always take your shoes off when you come in your home or make sure you wipe them clean before walking around inside.
- Make sure adults don't put insect repellent on your face or hands. This will help you to keep the repellent away from your eyes and mouth. If you do get some in your eyes, rinse with water right away.
- Wear light coloured pants and long-sleeved shirts and you won't need as much bug spray!
- Always wash your hands when you go inside and always wash your hands before eating.

**FRUITS AND  
VEGETABLES YOU  
BUY AT THE STORE  
MAY HAVE SOME  
PESTICIDES ON  
THEM. THIS IS WHY  
YOU SHOULD ALWAYS  
WASH THEM.**



# CHEMICAL PRODUCTS

## What are chemical products?

Your home and garage may be full of chemical products you may not think are dangerous. But those extra cans of paint, kitchen cleaners, detergent and bleach are all made with chemicals which could be dangerous to your health. Chemical products can even be found in your furniture, carpets, toys and sometimes your food and water.

## How can chemical products be harmful to my body?

Chemicals can enter your body through your skin if you touch them, through your lungs if you breathe the chemicals in, or you can swallow the chemicals when you eat or drink.

Sometimes exposure to chemicals can be irritating to your skin and eyes. You could start coughing or feel dizzy or get a headache. You may even get sick to your stomach. Some chemical products can even cause cancer, but there's lots of ways to help keep you and your family safe from chemicals.





### TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

How can I prevent chemicals from getting into my body?

- Keep all household chemicals, including medication in their original containers and out of the sight and reach of small children.
- Store paint, varnishes and yard chemicals in proper containers and keep them outside the home.
- Open your windows to refresh your indoor air as some household items and products can release chemicals into the air.
- Air out mattresses and other new furniture before using.
- Make sure you ask an adult to wash any new materials such as clothes, sheets and towels before you use them for the first time. This will get rid of most of the chemicals left on them.
- After being outside, always wash your hands when you come indoors.
- Make sure you always wash fruits and vegetables in running water before eating them.
- Ask an adult to teach you what the symbols on the labels mean and the different types of chemicals. Then you can teach the younger kids in your home as well.
- Ask the adults to avoid using aerosol sprays or scented products.



## Recognize these warning symbols



**Poison** – the contents of containers with this symbol are poisonous if swallowed, touched or inhaled.



**Corrosive** – the contents of containers with this symbol will burn skin or eyes and can also burn the stomach if swallowed.



**Flammable** – the contents of containers with this symbol catch fire easily if near heat, flames or sparks.



**Explosive** – containers with this symbol can explode if heated or punctured.

### Signal Words

Labels use signal words to show how toxic or hazardous a product can be.

**CAUTION** – this product may cause a temporary injury when it is not used correctly. Death may occur after extreme exposure

**DANGER** – this product may cause a temporary or permanent injury, or death.

**EXTREME DANGER** – being exposed to even a very small amount of this product may cause a temporary or permanent injury, or death. The adults in your family must be very careful when using anything with this label.

USE ARTS AND  
CRAFTS MATERIALS  
MADE FOR CHILDREN.  
SOME MATERIALS  
FOR ADULTS MAY  
BE HARMFUL.



# NOISE

## What did you say?

Sound is what you hear; noise can be unwanted sounds that can be unpleasant to the listener. What is a pleasing sound to one person may be a very annoying, distracting or disruptive noise to another. Either way, loud noise or sound can seriously damage your hearing if you are exposed to it long enough.

## How can noise be harmful to my body?

Loud noise is harmful to people of all ages. Loud noise can cause temporary (or permanent) hearing loss and a ringing/buzzing in your ears called tinnitus. This kind of damage could block your ability to learn and talk with your friends and family.

Noise can also disturb your school work, concentration and relaxation. It can even make it harder to get a

good night's sleep. Noise can cause stress and create or worsen physical problems such as high blood pressure, chronic exhaustion and heart disease.

A quieter environment means a restful place that promotes relaxation and a happier and healthier community.





## Where can harmful environmental noise come from?

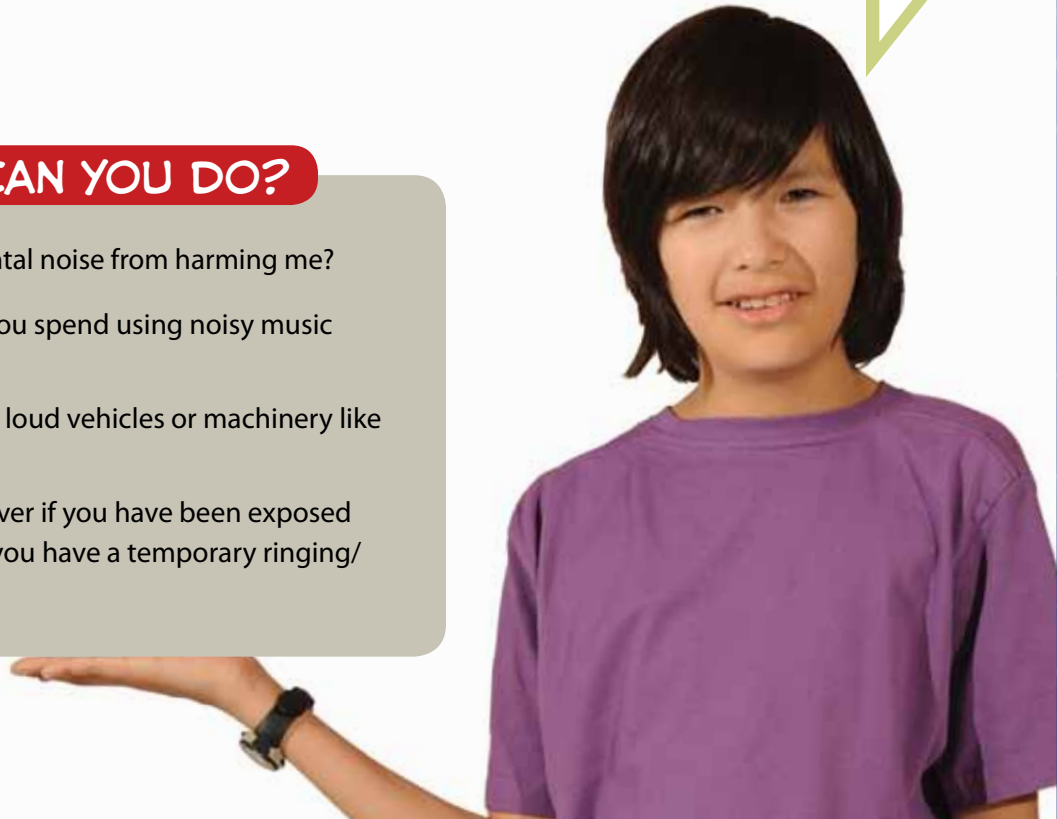
- Loud music and personal music players (mp3 players) used with headphone or ear buds
- Toys, especially noisy toys that younger children may hold too close to their ears
- Machinery
- Vehicles/motor boats
- Pets

## TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

How can I prevent environmental noise from harming me?

- Limit the amount of time you spend using noisy music players.
- Use earplugs when around loud vehicles or machinery like lawnmowers.
- Give your ears time to recover if you have been exposed to loud noise, especially if you have a temporary ringing/ buzzing in your ears.

ENJOY YOUR MUSIC  
AT A SAFE LEVEL. TURN  
IT DOWN IF SOMEONE  
A METRE AWAY NEEDS  
TO SHOUT TO BE  
UNDERSTOOD.





# What you can do!

## LEAD

- ☐ Help clean up the dust in your house by using a vacuum cleaner, duster or wet mop.
- ☐ Use only COLD tap water for drinking, cooking and if you are making baby formula.
- ☐ Wash your hands! A LOT!

## Indoor Air

### Tobacco Smoke

- ☐ Keep away from people who are smoking or try to stay in an area where you can get a lot of fresh air.
- ☐ Open a window if you can.

### Mould

- ☐ Turn on the fan or open a window when you're having a shower.
- ☐ Keep an eye out for water damage and mould in your home.

### Carbon Monoxide (CO)

Reming adults:

- ☐ To never use barbecues or outdoor stoves indoors.
- ☐ Not to use kerosene lamps, oil lamps or space heaters inside unless they are for the indoors.
- ☐ To get a Carbon Monoxide detector and make sure it works.

### Dust, Dust Mites and Pollen

- ☐ Help the adults with the dusting by using a wet rag and a vacuum.
- ☐ Always follow the directions when using cleaning products and make sure there's lots of fresh air.

## Drinking Water

- ☐ If your home uses well water, remind adults that your well should be tested for bacteria at least once a year.
- ☐ If your community receives a *Boil Water Advisory/Order*, bring any water you use for drinking, cooking, making ice cubes, washing food, and brushing your teeth to a rolling boil for one minute.

## PESTICIDES

- ☐ Make sure adults keep pesticides in their original container and stored in a locked cabinet.
- ☐ Check out other ways of getting rid of pests without pesticides.
- ☐ Never run or play on lawns or go into the garden if they have recently been sprayed.
- ☐ Always wash fruits and vegetables in running water to remove any pesticides.

## CHEMICAL PRODUCTS

- ☐ Keep all household chemicals, including medication in their original containers and out of the reach of small children.
- ☐ Store paint, varnishes and yard chemicals outside the home and in their proper containers.
- ☐ Ask the adults to avoid using aerosol sprays or scented products.
- ☐ Learn what the symbols on the labels mean and the different types of chemicals.
- ☐ Air out mattresses and other new furniture before bringing them inside and wash new clothes, sheets and towels before you use them.

## Noise

- ☐ Limit the amount of time you spend listening to loud music.
- ☐ Give yourself time to recover if you've been exposed to loud noise or have a ringing/ buzzing in your ears.

# Resources

Visit these Web sites for further information on a number of the potential health risks described in this guide:

- Health Canada's **Indoor Air quality** – [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/air/in/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/air/in/index-eng.php)
- Health Canada's **Health and Air Quality** – [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/air](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/air)
- Health Canada's **Mould & Your Health** – [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/mould](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/mould)
- Health Canada's **It's Your Health** – [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/index-eng.php)
- Health Canada's **Consumer Product Safety** – [www.health.gc.ca/consumer](http://www.health.gc.ca/consumer)
- Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education – **Be Food Safe:** [www.befoodsafe.ca](http://www.befoodsafe.ca)
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) – **Maintaining a home:** [www.cmhc.ca/en/co/maho](http://www.cmhc.ca/en/co/maho)
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) – **Indoor Air Quality Program:** [www.iaq-qai.com](http://www.iaq-qai.com)

To learn more about environmental health issues and tips on how to make changes in your home, visit your **local health centre** or go to [www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/environment](http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/environment)

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des Premières nations*