



Live, Play and Learn.

What you can do!

An Environmental Health Guide for
Inuit Youth



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

Indoor Air

Drinking Water

FOOD SAFETY

CHEMICAL PRODUCTS

Noise

Looking for Health Risks



Government of Canada / Gouvernement du Canada

Canada





Live, Play and Learn.

Home is where we hang out with our family and friends. We spend a lot of time at home, so home is also where our health is.

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 chemical products 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 explain how your home environment can affect your health. Plus there are lots of great tips on what you can do to help out!



Check out the ***Inuit 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 about what you can do about:

Indoor Air

Drinking Water

CHEMICAL PRODUCTS

Noise

FOOD SAFETY

Looking for Health Risks

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.

In the winter, we keep the windows and doors closed to keep our houses warm—but this means that indoor air can get stale and harmful chemicals can build up inside. These chemicals come from tobacco smoke, dust particles, and mould spores. They can also come from things around your house like carpets, plywood, paints, and glue.



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

Sometimes the air in your home can make you wheeze, cough and sneeze. You might have sore eyes, a runny nose, and a scratchy throat or even get an asthma attacks. But if the air in your home makes you feel sick, the good news is that you can do something about it!

TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- One of the easiest (and best!) ways to get rid of stale air is to let in some fresh air. Ask your mom or dad if you can open the windows for a short time to get rid of any harmful chemicals that might be in the air inside your home.

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

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



Tobacco Smoke

Tobacco smoke is not good for anyone's health. Even if you're not smoking, you can inhale "second-hand smoke" from the people smoking around you. It can pass through cracks under and around doors. This means that no place in your home or car is safe from tobacco smoke.

Toxic chemicals from tobacco smoke can even stay in the air the cigarette, cigar, or pipe is out. This is called third-hand smoke. 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.
- Ask smokers to light up outside—well away from doors and windows of your home.
- If someone is smoking inside your home or car, open a window.





Mould

Mould is a fungus that comes in a lot of different colours and it can grow in damp areas inside your home, school or daycare. Mould can grow on just about any surface, when there is too much humidity from water leaks, cooking, or showering.

Mould can affect the air you breathe by releasing spores that can cause allergic reactions like sneezing, coughing, wheezing and sore, itchy or red eyes and illness.

TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Inspect your home for signs of mould.
- If you have a fan above your stove, turn it on when you're boiling water.
- Instead of leaving your clothes on the floor, hang them up—especially if they are wet or damp.
- Get someone to help you raise your bed off the floor to let air circulate under the mattress.





Dust and Dust Mites

Every home has dust mites but they are so small that you can't see them. They live in beds, carpets, furniture, pillows and blankets. Dust can also have bits of chemicals or metals from the soil and environment outside.

Dust and dust mites can cause allergic reactions and other breathing problems like asthma. If you are allergic to dust mites you might sneeze and get itchy, watery eyes, a runny nose, or stuffy ears.

TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Help the adults in your home to dust your home regularly from top to bottom. You can use a damp cloth to stop the dust from getting into the air.
- Reduce your clutter so dust will have fewer places to settle. This way cleaning will be much faster and easier!
- Help to vacuum carpets, mattresses and any fabric-covered furniture.



Carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a harmful gas that has no colour, smell or taste. You won't know you are breathing it unless you have a carbon monoxide detector. Even at low levels, CO can cause breathing problems and headaches.

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 put at least one carbon monoxide detector with a sound alarm in your home.
- That cars, trucks, and snowmobiles shouldn't be running near open doors or windows.
- 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.



Drinking Water

Where does my drinking water come from?

The water you get from your faucet can come from the water in lakes or melted ice (surface water). Typically in the North, surface water is naturally clean, but sometimes it can become contaminated. Even our water tanks aren't always clean enough. When that happens we have to clean 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.

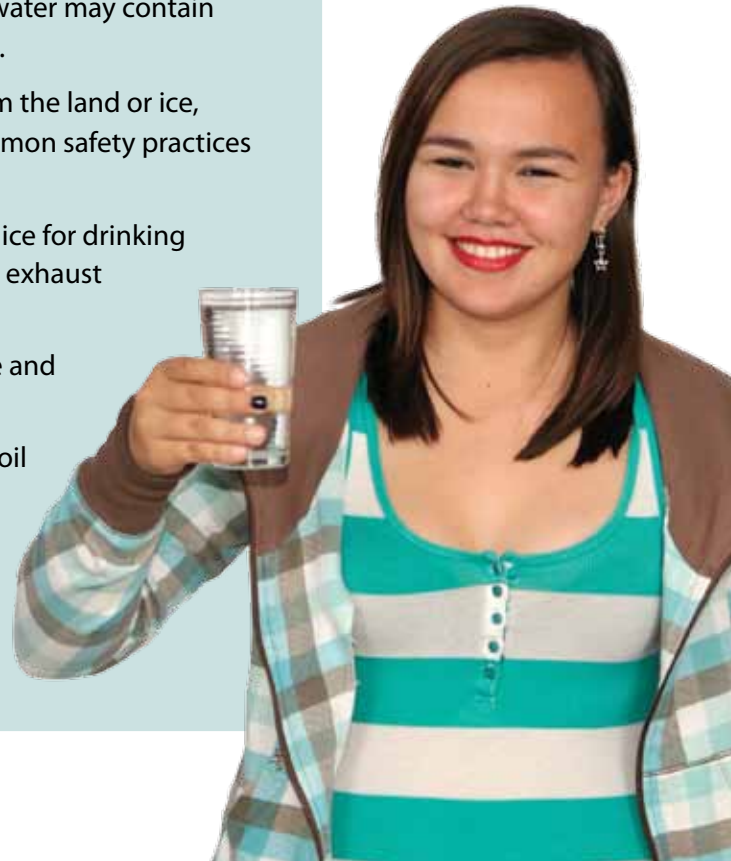


Drinking Water

TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- 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.
- Use only **cold** tap water for drinking, cooking and making baby formula, since hot water may contain more lead or other contaminants.
- If you plan on drinking water from the land or ice, speak to an elder and follow common safety practices such as:
 - Choose a clean area to collect ice for drinking water, away from snowmobile exhaust or other sources of pollution;
 - Shave off the outer layer of ice and collect the fresh inner core.
 - Bring your water to a rolling boil for a full minute before use;
 - Store the water in clean containers; and
 - Cover the water to avoid incoming debris.

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



Drinking Water



FOOD SAFETY

How can food harm my body?

You can get sick from eating food that has been contaminated with an unwanted micro-organism, such as a bacteria, virus or parasite. This type of illness is known as food poisoning which can give you stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever. We all have an important role to play in practicing safe food handling techniques in the home.



TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables under cool running water before you eat or cook them.
- Refrigerate or freeze foods that can spoil, as well as cooked food within two hours.
- Ask an adult if they can clean country food (fish, caribou, deer, seal, etc.) outside—if it isn't too cold. Disease-causing micro-organisms may be on the animal's skin or fur.
- If country food is cleaned indoors, make sure that someone completely cleans and disinfects the counters, cutting boards, utensils and knives when they are finished. Make sure to throw away all cardboard and plastic used while cleaning meat when finished. Turn on a fan or open a window, weather permitting, to get good air flow, if needed.
- Use two separate cutting boards: one for raw meats and one for vegetables.

**ALWAYS WASH YOUR
HANDS WITH SOAP
AND WARM WATER
BEFORE AND AFTER
YOU TOUCH FOOD.**



CHEMICAL PRODUCTS

What are chemical products?

Your home 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, or toys.

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.



Everyone in your home should learn what these symbols mean:



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.

Each warning symbol also has one of these words under it.

CAUTION – means a temporary injury may occur from improper use of the product. Death may occur after extreme exposure.

DANGER – means that the product may cause temporary or permanent injury, or death.

EXTREME DANGER – means that being exposed to even a very low quantity of the product may cause death, or temporary or permanent injury. Be very, very careful.



TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Make sure chemical products such as insect repellent are stored properly and out of reach of small children.
- Learn the symbols and labels on containers. If there is anything in the label instructions that you do not understand, ask for help.
- Make sure that fuel and oil products and any machinery containing these products are properly stored outside of your home.
- Make sure that child-resistant containers are being used for chemical products.
- Try using white vinegar and water instead of chemicals to clean your home.

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 are 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 the body?

Loud noises can give you temporary or permanent hearing loss and ringing or buzzing in your ears (tinnitus). This makes it hard to have a normal conversation, to have fun or to get a good night's sleep.



What loud noises can hurt us?

- Personal music players used with headphones or ear buds.
- Badly maintained snowmobiles or four wheelers.
- Gunfire, both over the short and long-term.
- Toys, especially noisy toys that may be held too close to a child's ear or that a child may use in ways that are not according to the manufacturer's "recommended use" instructions.

TIPS - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

How can I prevent environmental noise from harming me?

- Keep the volume of your personal music player at an enjoyable, but safe level. If someone a metre away must shout to be understood, your music is probably higher than 85 decibels and may be dangerous.
- Wear protective gear such as ear plugs while hunting.

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





What you can do!

Indoor Air

Tobacco Smoke

- Make your home as smoke-free as possible.

Mould

- Check for mould that can be seen, especially in damp areas like the bathroom.
- Fix leaks and clean up after leaks and floods.
- Turn on fans or open windows (if it's not too cold), when showering or boiling water on the stove.

Dust, Dust Mites

- Dust and vacuum regularly.

Carbon Monoxide

- Ask an adult to install a Canadian Standards Association (CSA) approved carbon monoxide detector and smoke-detector on each level of your home.

Drinking Water

- 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.
- Use only **cold** tap water for drinking, cooking and making baby formula, since hot water may contain more lead or other contaminants.

FOOD SAFETY

- Wash hands, cooking surfaces, dishes and utensils before and after you handle food.
- Refrigerate or freeze foods that can spoil, as well as cooked food within two hours.

CHEMICAL PRODUCTS

- Learn the symbols and labels on containers. If there is anything in the label instructions that you do not understand, ask for help.
- Don't store materials like paint or kerosene inside your home.

Noise

- Wear ear protection if exposed to loud noises.
- Don't play your music too loud.

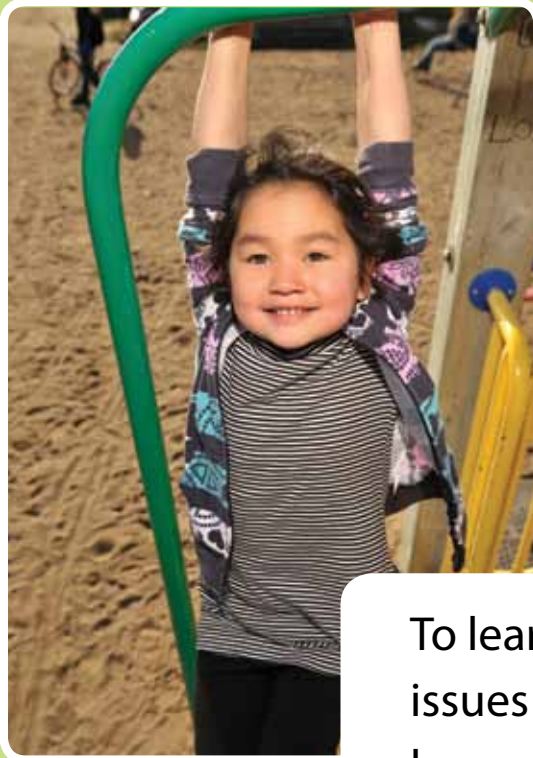


Resources

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

- Health Canada's **Mould & Your Health** – 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
- Health Canada's **Consumer Product Safety** – www.health.gc.ca/consumer
- Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education – **Be Food Safe:**
www.befoodsafe.ca
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) – **Maintaining a home:**
www.cmhc.ca/en/co/maho
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) – **Indoor Air Quality Program:**
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.healthy Canadians.gc.ca/environment**

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Vivre, jouer et apprendre. Ce que tu peux faire!

Guide sur la santé environnementale pour les jeunes Inuits