



## BASIC FACT SHEET ON ASTHMA

### WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects a person's airway. Asthma can cause the inside walls of the airway to become inflamed and swollen. Certain things may cause a person's asthma to become worse. These things are called triggers. It is unknown for certain what causes asthma.

### WHAT ARE SOME ASTHMA TRIGGERS WITHIN THE HOME?

Some asthma triggers are pollen, pet dander or skin flakes, roach and other pest excretions, dust mites, cigarette smoke, and environmental factors such as cold weather and mold. A person with asthma may react to one or many of these triggers. That is, a person may have an asthma attack from exposure to one of these triggers or a person may need exposure to many of these triggers to have an attack.

### HOW CAN ASTHMA TRIGGERS BE AVOIDED?

Not all asthma triggers can be avoided, but many triggers can be reduced. Here are some tips on how to reduce exposure to certain triggers.

**Pets** – If pets live in the home, do not allow the pet into the room where the person with asthma sleeps. Also, bathing a pet regularly may help reduce the dander on the pet.

**Smoking** – Cigar, cigarette, or pipe smoking should not be done within the home. Keep all types of smoke away from the person with asthma. Homes should be smoke-free.

**Dust mites** – Dust mites naturally live in mattresses and pillows. Zippered covers created especially for containing dust mites are available at many retail outlets. Use the special allergy covers on mattresses and pillows and tape over the zippered seam to help ensure the dust mites are fully contained. Also, wash bedding weekly in hot water, 130 degrees or hotter, to kill dust mites.

**Pests** – If any signs of pests are present, make sure to take steps to keep pests out. Tightly cover all food stored in pantries or cupboards, this includes pet food. Make sure to pick up pet food, if left out for an extended period, so this does not become a food source for pests. Clean up spills immediately, wipe down counters frequently, and make sure not to leave out any dirty dishes.

**Mold** – If mold is found within the home, take steps to identify the source of the mold and make sure to clean up the moldy area. Keep the person with asthma out of the area while cleaning.

**Scented products** – Most products available contain some kind of scent. Whenever possible, purchase fragrance-free. Also, try to avoid all scented air fresheners, both plug-in and air spray types.

More information about asthma is available from the Allergy & Asthma Network: Mothers of Asthmatics 888- 878-4403, and [www.aanma.org](http://www.aanma.org) or from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [www.cdc.gov/health/asthma.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/health/asthma.htm).