

# Keep it Contaminant Free:

Ways to help keep your home  
free of contaminants



**MAPEHSU**

Mid-America Pediatric  
Environmental Health  
Specialty Unit



*The best way to avoid exposure to harmful chemicals in your home is to remove them or avoid using these products altogether. When that's not possible, there are still steps you can take to reduce your exposure.*

## Common household contaminants include:

**Smoke** - including tobacco, cannabis, wildfire smoke and even vaping



- Smoke is known to increase the risk of cancer, lung disease and heart disease and is also linked to the development of asthma in children.
- Exposure can occur through secondhand smoke (inhaled by other nearby) or thirdhand smoke (residue that settles on surfaces and fabrics)
- Whatever the source, smoke should be kept out of the home. If someone in the home smokes, we recommend they quit, smoke outdoors and away from others and use exhaust fans.

## Particulate matter – *Tiny particles we breathe in, like dust – even if we can't see them.*



- Breathing in these particles has been linked to a variety of health issues. The health risks depend on what the particles are made of and how much we're exposed to.
- Everything breaks down over time – even the paint on your walls. That's why regular cleaning and maintenance are important.

## Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) – *invisible gases released from many everyday products. We do not see these, but sometimes we can smell them.*



- Common sources of VOCs include air fresheners, cleaning products, varnishes, solvents and finishes, drywall, paints, carpeting and others.
- Other common chemicals in our homes include phthalates, which found in plastics and personal care products like cosmetics. They've been linked to some cancers, hormone problems and other health issues. Flame retardants are used in clothing, furniture and electronics to prevent fires. Some of these chemicals may affect the liver, thyroid and brain development.

### What You Can Do

Choose safer products when possible and avoid plastics. Look for products certified by the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Safer Choices or review personal care product safety at the Environmental Working Group's (EWG). See our related factsheets on Keep It Ventilated, Keep it Clean and Keep it Maintained for more ways to reduce harmful chemical exposures at home.



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