

- Roof shingles.
- Floor tiles and adhesives used to mount them.

If you think asbestos is present in your home, remember that it is best left *untouched*. The ALA reports that it is only hazardous when ingested. Therefore, unless you suspect you have disturbed an area where asbestos fibers may be present, there is no cause for alarm.

Mold Matters

Mold is a hazard less likely to be deadly or debilitating than lead, CO, radon, and asbestos, but it still poses a danger to you and your family. Mold exists everywhere, in all settings, inside and out, wet or dry, and it can potentially cause health problems if not addressed. According to the CDC, over 1,000 types of molds have appeared in homes across America. Fortunately, unlike the gaseous dangers of CO and radon, the undetectable taste of lead, and the microscopic, fibrous nature of asbestos, mold can be seen with the naked eye in the form of dark growths, often resembling inkblots.

The microscopic offspring of mold (spores) travel through the air. Certain rooms in your home may be more susceptible than others. For example, the bathroom can be a breeding ground for dangerous mold due to the frequent moisture. Currently, the CDC reports that many of the dangers of mold are unknown, but it has been linked to some cancers. More commonly, however, it affects people who are allergic to it, often causing further complications for asthmatics.

Although you might not be able to see mold until *after* it has begun growing, the following measures can help you eliminate it:

- Clean vulnerable areas monthly. Tile and grout are prime targets for fungi. Regular cleaning may help prevent mold before it starts.

- Ventilate closed-in areas. A bathroom fan can help minimize daily moisture. Also, consider using a dehumidifier in a damp basement or cellar.
- Monitor kitchen and bathroom carpets regularly. The moisture on a rugged surface can quickly turn a decorative rug into a harbor for fungi.
- Remove paper, books, and old clothes that are no longer in use. These porous materials tend to invite mold.

If you have been overexposed to molds or are allergic to molds, you may experience symptoms similar to those of pollen allergies or “hay fever,” which include sneezing and coughing. Remember, more likely than not, you will be unable to rid your home of all mold, but you may be able to protect yourself and your family from overexposure.

Education for Protection

For more information about carbon monoxide, radon, and asbestos visit the Environmental Protection Agency at www.epa.gov or the American Lung Association at www.lungusa.org. For further research on mold, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov. And for more information on how to protect your family from lead exposure, or what to do if you have been exposed, contact the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD.

Fighting often unknown, invisible, tasteless, and odorless dangers in your home, especially those that are toxic, can be frustrating. Educating yourself and your family can help you win that battle.

Dangers in the Home

Do You Know the Hidden Hazards?



Invisible. Tasteless. Odorless. Toxic. These are just a few features of potential hazards in your home. Lead, carbon monoxide, radon, asbestos, and mold can all be a danger to you and your family. Learning more about these hidden household toxins may help you reduce or prevent exposure.

Lead in Your Home: A Slow Poison

Lead is a proven health hazard. Unless otherwise “deleaded,” most older homes and buildings constructed prior to 1978 are likely to contain lead paint, which is the most common form of lead found in homes. Fortunately, home-sellers and landlords are now required to disclose any “known information” on lead in the home.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), lead paint can enter the body simply as a person breathes in dust containing lead paint particles. It can be particularly dangerous to children under age six because they are developing mentally and physically at a rapid pace. However, lead is also a danger to adults. The effects of lead may be as minor as concentration and memory problems, or as severe as nerve disorders and reproductive difficulties.

To protect your family’s health, be sure to familiarize yourself with the following information:

- Have your home tested for lead paint, especially if it was built before 1978. If lead paint is detected, do not try to remove it yourself. Improper removal can create a more dangerous environment.
- Talk to your doctor or your local health department to see if you or your child should be tested for lead.
- The primary source for lead exposure is lead-based paint that is peeling, chipping,

chalking, or cracking — an obvious hazard when found on open surfaces that children can access, such as window trim and sills, doors and door frames, stairs, railings, banisters, porches, and fences.

- When scraped, sanded, or heated, lead-based paint can give off lead dust that could settle and reenter the air when you vacuum, sweep, or walk through affected areas.
- Lead solder in your pipes can contaminate drinking water. If you suspect lead in your plumbing, call your local health department to find out about testing your water.
- Lead can also be found in your yard. If lead is in your soil, you can unknowingly track it into your home, or a child can play in contaminated soil.

By maintaining your awareness of these concerns and adopting a *proactive* attitude toward minimizing exposure, you can help reduce the potential lead poisoning risk to your family’s health.

Carbon Monoxide: CO and You

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a gas produced by items commonly found in homes. Gas-stoves, furnaces, water-heaters, chimneys, and space heaters — items that burn fuel — produce CO. If your home is not ventilated properly, or if these items are not properly maintained, you and your family may be exposed to carbon monoxide poisoning. The symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to those of the flu or even the common cold. They include nausea and vomiting, headaches and dizziness, fatigue, and chest pain. Because, these symptoms are present in many common illnesses, it may be difficult to suspect exposure to CO poisoning. If left untreated, CO poisoning may lead to permanent damage to organs, such

as the heart, and overexposure may be fatal. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that over 400 people per year in the United States are fatal victims of “unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning.”

The following steps can help minimize exposure to CO poisoning:

- Allow fresh air into the house regularly through open windows and/or screen doors.
- Remember to have your chimney inspected and cleaned once a year to ensure the flue is clear.
- Wait until your garage door is open before starting your car.
- Always be sure that your gas stove is completely turned off when it is not in use.

In addition, consider contacting your local utility companies to inspect any equipment you suspect may be faulty or might contribute to the air quality of your home.

The Reality of Radon

Another deadly gas that may be lurking in your home is **radon**. Like carbon monoxide, radon is invisible to the eye and undetectable by smell or taste. According to the American Lung Association (ALA), it is “a leading cause of lung cancer, second only to cigarette smoking, and it is responsible for thousands of deaths annually.”

Radon gas is produced as uranium decays, and it is prevalent in soil and rock, which decay underground. Any building below three stories should be tested for radon. The following facts may help you better understand radon and its effects:

- Radon makes its way into a home through openings such as foundation cracks and porous floors.
- Radon may be present in your water supply.
- According to the ALA, high levels of radon affect approximately 8 million homes in the United States, and radon has been found in all 50 states.
- Just because your neighbor’s home has normal levels of radon doesn’t mean that your home is equally level.

If you wonder about the presence of radon in *your* home, you can test for it yourself using either a short-term test kit or a long-term test kit that remains in your home for more than 90 days. When you purchase a test kit, check that it has been approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help ensure accurate results.

About Asbestos. . .

Asbestos mineral fibers were once a common household building material. Primarily found in the insulation of homes built prior to 1978, these fibers, if disturbed and inhaled, can have deadly consequences. The principal effects of high exposure to asbestos as reported by the ALA are lung cancer; asbestosis — a scarring of the lungs; and mesothelioma — a cancer that attacks the abdominal cavity and chest lining. Unfortunately, the symptoms of overexposure may take as many as 30 years to present themselves.

Although it stopped being used in 1978, asbestos may still exist in many homes. Some of the following places in your home may contain asbestos fibers:

- Any place with insulation, such as furnace ducts or boilers.