

Improve Your Indoor Air Quality

- Dust frequently with a damp or microfiber cloth
- Wash bedding frequently to reduce dust mites
- Use and clean HEPA air purifiers according to the manufacturer's directions
- Minimize use of fragranced products and aerosols
- Clean bathrooms and kitchens frequently
- Report water leaks



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Improve Indoor Air Quality in Your Room or Apartment

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**ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
AND SAFETY**

The following are some common situations which could impact an individual's health or comfort while indoors.

Dust, Dust Mites, and Air Purifiers

Dust is mostly skin cells, hair fragments, clothing and paper fibers, pollen, dirt, and other tiny particles from items in our environment. When inhaled, dust can be a respiratory irritant. Some products can contribute to household dust, such as powders, sprays, and products (some hair products, fabric softeners) that leave a coating that can flake off. In the typical small dorm room environment, these dusts can collect quickly.

Using fans in a dusty room can circulate the dust and keep it suspended in the air.

Dust mites can also be a source of respiratory irritation. They are quite common in household dust and survive by eating skin cells and other materials in dust.

You can reduce exposure to dust and dust mites by:

- cleaning weekly with a damp or microfiber cloth to remove dust
- washing bedding weekly in hot water
- washing throw rugs and other soft furnishings frequently
- using allergen blocking pillow covers

When used and maintained properly, **appropriately sized** air purifiers with HEPA filters or combination HEPA filters can filter out dust in the environment.

* Avoid air purifiers with additional technologies such as UV-C, bipolar ionization and photocatalyst oxidation (PCO) technologies. These technologies can produce unwanted by-products such as ozone, formaldehyde and other contaminants that may be detrimental to health.

Fragrance Products and Other VOC's

Some components of fragrance formulas found in scented candles, cleaners, air fresheners, essential oil diffusers, laundry products, personal care products, perfumes, body sprays and other scented products may trigger allergic reactions or sensitivities in some individuals. This is especially true for people with existing respiratory conditions, infections, or allergies.

For people with sensitivities to certain fragrances, inhaling them may result in shortness of breath, the sensation of being suffocated, coughing, phlegm, a runny or stuffy nose, headache, chest tightness, and wheezing.

Allergic reactions, including contact dermatitis, can range in severity, but may include hives, itchy skin, a rash, flaking or peeling skin, facial swelling, irritation of the eyes, nose and mouth, wheezing, and anaphylaxis. *

If you experience symptoms of what you suspect is an allergic reaction, consult your healthcare professional, as sensitivity to allergens can become more severe over time. Be sure to discuss with your healthcare provider what product or substance you think might be triggering the allergic reaction.

While students cannot completely eliminate exposures when living in the close dormitory setting and being exposed to other occupants, refraining from using fragranced products in their room may help alleviate symptoms.

Scented products, nail polish and removers, aerosol sprays and other products can also produce volatile organic compounds (VOCs) which can affect your health.

Eye and respiratory tract irritation, headaches, and dizziness are some common symptoms of exposure to VOCs.

Household products should be used according to the manufacturer's directions including supplying plenty of fresh air when using these products.

Comforters, pillows, throw rugs and other new furnishings should be washed or aired out before they are first used to reduce exposure to chemicals used in their manufacture.

While scented and VOC (volatile organic compounds) producing products may be used at home without an issue, their use in a small space may have a different impact.

Humidity and Mold

Indoor humidity levels tend to drop over the fall and winter. **Humidity below 30% can cause dry skin, irritate nasal passages and throat, and make your eyes itchy.**

⇒ We **do not** recommend the use of humidifiers in student rooms. Humidifiers require daily water changes and thorough cleaning several times a week to prevent growth of bacteria and mold. Using a dirty humidifier can cause flu-like symptoms and infections and can cause mold growth if humidity levels get too high.

A doctor or pharmacist may be able to suggest alternatives, such as saline nasal spray, to help alleviate symptoms caused by dry air.

Finally, mold growth can be a problem when sources of moisture are introduced. Mold spores are naturally found outdoors and indoors and vary with the seasons and weather. Plants and pets can increase mold spores indoors.

When there is a source of moisture indoors (high humidity, condensation, water leaks, food and drinks, etc.), these mold spores can germinate, much like plant seeds, causing mold growth to occur in as little as 24 hours.

It is not uncommon to find mold growth in bathrooms due to moisture and it is easily cleaned.

Wet towels, condensation on refrigerators or windows, unreported water leaks, spills not adequately cleaned, and food and dirty dishes left in the room can all lead to mold growth on surfaces.

Preventing sources of moisture is the key to preventing mold growth.

*Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that can be life-threatening. Symptoms of anaphylaxis include a lack of consciousness, shortness of breath, trouble swallowing, lightheadedness, chest pain, a rapid, weak pulse, nausea, and vomiting. If anaphylaxis symptoms occur, seek immediate medical attention.