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Be Aware of Indoor Asthma Triggers

by Jack Barnette, AE-C

A friend told me that Chicago was experiencing the worst winter since 1811. That didn't seem right so I Googled it and found out that Chicago wasn't founded until 1833. He was a little off on his history, but he may have been on to something regarding the weather. Chicago and the whole middle of the country has been experiencing a very tough winter. Could it really be the Polar Vortex? In any case, it has been cold followed by snow, followed by cold, followed by snow, and then even more cold [unconscious thought: I think I'm beginning to resent all my dear colleagues who live in Arizona, or California, or Florida...] where was I, oh yes, because of the extreme cold weather people are spending more time indoors, and the indoor environment can be just as full of environmental asthma triggers as the outside world.

Sure, cold air can be a trigger, and exercise (like shoveling snow) is a known inducer of asthma symptoms, but though it may seem cozy in your home, or school, or office, indoor triggers can be a real concern. A broken pipe can be the source of a hidden leak. An undetected leak will inevitably lead to a mold problem. Molds, as you know, are fungi. Marcus Roper, a mathematician at UCLA, called fungi, "the dark matter of biology." Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) believe mold spores to be asthma triggers in sensitive people. Recent research has shown that infants raised in a home with moldy areas may be more likely to develop childhood asthma. Researchers at the University of Cardiff in the

United Kingdom believe they have detected a significant difference in the fungal flora of healthy lungs versus the lungs of people with asthma. Additional indoor triggers include dust mites, pet dander, secondhand smoke, cockroach droppings, space heaters, and a number of other sources. Needless to say, much more research is needed on molds, indoor triggers, and asthma in general. In the mean time, we just have to help people avoid their triggers, listen to their healthcare providers, and use common sense. Stay well, stay warm, and keep up the good work [unconscious thought: I wonder what the temperature is in Palm Springs right now?], together we can help to improve the health and quality of life of the people we serve and fight the good fight [unconscious thought: now getting hungry; sandwich, must get a sandwich].

Text Messaging Helps to Increases the Rate of Flu Vaccinations in Pregnant Women

A recent study by the School of Public Health at Columbia University found text messaging boosts vaccine rates in pregnant women. The findings showed that sending text messages to a low-income obstetric population resulted in an increase in influenza vaccination. This increase was especially significant for those who received the messages in their third trimester. This report was published in a special issue of the American Journal of Public Health that was focused the latest methods and practices in improving birth outcomes.

Exposure to Both Diesel and Dust Mites May Result in More Severe Asthma

Research at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center has shown that exposure to both diesel and dust mites may result in more severe asthma symptoms than just exposures to dust mites alone. The study found that this may be due to increased blood levels of IL-17A, a protein associated with several chronic inflammatory diseases in children with high diesel exposure. Gurjit Khurrana Hershey, MD, PhD, director of asthma research at Cincinnati Children's and senior author of the study said, " Blocking Il-17A may be a useful strategy to counteract the effects of traffic-related air pollution, especially in highly exposed allergic asthmatic children."

Cold Air as an Asthma Trigger

The other day it was -11 below zero around here. The record for this date is -13 below - but what is a couple of degrees among friends. I walked the 75 feet or so out to the street to pick up the morning paper, and was hit by that first blast of cold air. To say that it took my breath away is no exaggeration. I felt my chest tighten and I started coughing. Breathing cold air can be a trigger for some people. Also, wintery weather can bring on colds, flu, and other viral respiratory infections that can worsen asthma. Cold, dry air can tighen airways and cause broncospasm - like the minor one I experienced this morning. Coughing, wheezing, chest tighness and shortness of breath can be all too common during these extreme cold spells. Take all the necessary precautions to stay well this winter season.

EPA Releases Moisture Control Guidance

In December, the U.S.EPA released a practical guidance on how to control moisture in buildings. The guide discusses designing for moisture control, health implications of dampness in buildings, and advice on operating and maintaining moisture-controlled environments. The document can be view and downloaded at: http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pdfs/moisture-control.pdf

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