



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND MENTAL HYGIENE**
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Commissioner

Respiratory Health in New York City Neighborhoods Most Affected by Hurricane Sandy

Hurricane Sandy left parts of New York City, including many homes, with major damage. While New York State Department of Environmental Conservation outdoor air quality testing has not shown any unusual air quality risks since Hurricane Sandy, the Health Department continues to urge New Yorkers to protect themselves from potential indoor and cleanup-related respiratory irritants, such as:

- dust produced from home repairs and debris removal
- mold growth caused by wet and damaged building materials
- dangerous fumes and gases from using stoves and portable gas heaters for heat and strong cleaning products.

Dust, mold and fumes can irritate eyes, throat and lungs. They can make conditions that people already have – like asthma or allergies – worse. It is also the season for respiratory viruses, such as colds and influenza.

Volunteers and residents who are cleaning up or still living in affected homes can protect themselves by following these tips:

During clean up

- Open windows and doors to air out the area as much as possible.
- Keep children and pets away from areas you're cleaning.
- Use a dust mask and safety glasses or goggles if cleaning will produce dust. Dust masks that fit the face and nose, as well as respirators (special face masks) called N-95s provide better protection.
- Clean with soap (*e.g.*, dish detergent) and water. Do not use full-strength bleach or mix bleach with other cleaning products, like ammonia. Use only diluted bleach on areas that need to be disinfected.
- If your home has a lot of flood damage, consider hiring a professional to do the cleanup and repairs.
- Never use portable generators or gas-powered tools indoors.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water—especially before eating or drinking. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used if water is not available.

If your home does not have heat or electricity

- Do not use your oven or a portable gas heater to heat your home. They create gases that can be irritating and cause deadly levels of carbon monoxide.
- Boiling water in pots to keep your home warm increases humidity and can lead to mold growth.
- Turn off the stove while you are sleeping or if you leave home.

To get warm

- Wear layers of loose-fitting clothing.
- Cover your head, hands and feet.
- Sleep with layers of blankets.
- Consume hot drinks and food if possible.
- Avoid alcohol, which can cause you to lose body heat faster.
- Try to spend time in a heated place each day.

Learn about assistance for temporary housing while your home is being fixed. Visit a NYC Restoration Center or call 311.

Avoiding asthma attacks

Dust and other indoor irritants can make asthma worse. People may also not be able to take their usual asthma medication due to the storm, which can lead to asthma attacks. If you have asthma or allergies:

- Make sure you or your children take prescribed medications.
- Avoid tobacco smoke, dust and other irritants as much as possible.
- Get your annual influenza vaccine.
- If you have asthma, follow your treatment plan to help keep it under control.
- See your doctor if you are having health problems.

To find a medical van near you, visit a NYC Restoration Center or call 311.