



**Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit**  
Region 2: NJ | NY | PR | USVI

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### **Keeping Your Family Safe While Travelling: Environmental Safety Tips**

Travelers are now staying in a variety of vacation homes including hotels, private homes and apartments, time-shares, and short-term rentals. When deciding where to stay, here are questions you can ask to reduce the likelihood of an unhealthy environmental exposure and help ensure a safe vacation!

#### **What to ask about potential chemical exposures:**

- 1. Have there been any recent instances of bed bug infestations or other pests that required treatment with pesticides?**
  - If so, ask what pesticide was applied, and find out the date, time and location of the application of the pesticide. If a pesticide was applied indoors, go to question 3 below.
- 2. What pesticides are routinely used both indoors and outdoors?**
  - Routine application of pesticides increases the risk of adverse health outcomes from exposure, and is also not the most environmentally responsible method of pest control. The practice of “integrated pest management” is the preferred, less-toxic approach to dealing with indoor pests.
  - More information on a list of commonly used less-toxic pesticide products:  
[http://www.ourwaterourworld.org/Portals/0/documents/pdf/products\\_by\\_pests.pdf](http://www.ourwaterourworld.org/Portals/0/documents/pdf/products_by_pests.pdf)
  - More information on integrated pest management:  
[http://www.epa.gov/pep/htmlpublications/ipm\\_fact\\_sheet.html](http://www.epa.gov/pep/htmlpublications/ipm_fact_sheet.html)
- 3. When was the last time that pesticides were applied indoors?**
  - Different pesticides have recommendations listed on their labels for the amount of time that a person should be out of the treatment area after an application. Pesticide application typically leaves residuals which can be a source of exposure and potential adverse health effects. If pesticides were recently applied and label information is available, do not enter the space until the treated area is aerated and an appropriate amount of time has passed. More information on indoor pesticide application and reducing exposure to pesticides after an application:  
<http://npic.orst.edu/health/minexp.html>
- 4. Is the pesticides company listed as “Green Shield” certified?**
  - Green Shield certified companies use Integrated Pest Management practices to minimize use of pesticides and avoid pesticide exposure.
  - More information: <http://www.greenshieldcertified.org/providers/>
- 5. Are household cleaning/maintenance products stored properly in sealed containers and securely out of reach of children?**
  - Hazardous items can include paint products, cleaning agents, and pesticides to name a few. Improper storage of any of these items can pose safety risks to children if touched, breathed in, or ingested. They can have indirect adverse health effects, such as by affecting indoor air quality.
  - More information: <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/regulating/store.htm> and

<http://npic.orst.edu/health/storage.html>

**6. Is the water for the unit sourced from a public or private water supply?**

- Public water supplies are regulated by the federal government in the US and many other countries. Private water supplies aren't regulated but can be compared to public health standards. Inquire whether water testing results for a private water supply are available. Consult the CDC travel guide for whether municipal water is safe to drink in the country you are visiting.
- More water information from the EPA: <http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/well/>
- CDC travel guides: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>

**What to ask about indoor air quality:**

**1. Is there a working carbon monoxide alarm and smoke detector in the unit?**

- There should be a functional smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector on every room/floor. Check that there is a working battery.
- More information: [http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pdfs/co\\_factsheet\\_en.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pdfs/co_factsheet_en.pdf)

**2. Are the unit and neighboring units non-smoking?**

- Smokers can leave behind second-hand smoke and "third-hand smoke" attached to surfaces like upholstery and linens. These exposures can cause respiratory symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, shortness of breath, and possibly exacerbate underlying asthma.
- More information: [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/secondhand\\_smoke/general\\_facts/](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/secondhand_smoke/general_facts/)

**3. Have there been any water leaks/damage?**

- Water or flood damage can introduce new organisms and dampness into the home that may not be visible but that may still affect indoor air quality and result in health concerns such as allergic reactions, congestion, or asthma attacks in sensitive individuals.
- More information: <http://www.epa.gov/mold/pdfs/flood.pdf>

**4. Is there any visible mold or musty odor?**

- Mold grows indoors in damp, wet places; it is an irritant to the respiratory tract and may lead to allergic reactions in sensitive individuals.
- More information: <http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldresources.html>

**5. Are green cleaning products used?**

- Chemical-based cleaning products like bleach can affect indoor air quality with potential adverse health effects. Less toxic alternatives are preferred.
- More information: <http://www.epa.gov/epp/pubs/cleaning.htm>

**6. Is there any active construction/renovation occurring?**

- Renovations, repair jobs and paint jobs in homes and buildings can release dust, which may be contaminated with substances like lead or asbestos.
- More information: <http://www2.epa.gov/lead>
- More information: <http://www2.epa.gov/asbestos/learn-about-asbestos>

**7. Are there lead paint hazards present?**

- Inquire about peeling paint in areas where children have easy access such as windows, stairs, and floors. Damage to door frames from repeated impact can also damage the paint and release lead-contaminated paint chips. In the US, buildings built prior to 1978

may contain lead, but in some other countries lead-based paint was used more recently. Ensure that infants and toddlers do not have access to areas of peeling paint.

- More information: <http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/403fs01.pdf>
8. Are there any ongoing pest infestations?
- Pests such as mice or cockroaches can affect indoor air quality through transmission of allergens and can cause allergic reactions and trigger asthma.
  - More information: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/biologic.html>

### **A few other things to consider for families with young children:**

1. In a multi-story apartment unit, are window guards in place?
  - Window guards prevent accidental child injury and death from falls through unguarded windows. Regulations will vary by location, so be cautious if no window guards are available.
  - More information on New York City guidelines on window guards can be found at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/environmental/window-falls.shtml>
2. Is access to the pool properly secured?
  - Outdoor pools must be appropriately fenced off. Regardless of appropriate fencing, young children should be fully supervised at all times around pools.
  - For more information on pool safety: <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Swimming-Pool-Safety.aspx>

### **General information for travel:**

- Visit your doctor prior to international travel to make sure vaccinations are up to date and discuss travel-related medical issues.  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/common-travel-health-topics>
- Avoiding insect bites is often a concern for families, and information on what steps can be taken to prevent bug bites as well as selecting appropriate insect repellants can be found at <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/avoid-bug-bites>
- When traveling, you can also be aware of the impact your travels may have on the environment. Here are some green traveling tips to help you have a fun and eco-friendly trip. <http://www.epa.gov/region1/communities/traveltips.html>
- Sun and Water Safety Tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics  
<https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/news-features-and-safety-tips/pages/Sun-and-Water-Safety-Tips.aspx>

### **Mobile App on Travel Information offered by CDC:**

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/apps-about>

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