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Clearing the Air

Minnesotans can lower asthma risks by targeting ‘triggers’

Saint Paul, Minn. – (May, 1, 2004) --More than a quarter million Minnesotans have asthma, a chronic inflammatory respiratory disease, according to the American Lung Association. Governor Pawlenty has declared May 4, 2004 as Asthma Awareness Day in Minnesota, and the Minnesota Department of Health and American Lung Association of Minnesota are urging all Minnesotans to reduce their exposure to pollutants in indoor and outdoor air that can trigger asthma.

“Besides taking asthma medications as directed by a health care provider, controlling asthma triggers in your environment is the single best step you can take against asthma,” said Lyann Yates, director of the Minnesota Asthma Coalition. “We don’t know for certain what causes asthma, but we do know what triggers asthma episodes in many people. In outdoor air, some of the major triggers are ozone, cold air and fine particle pollution. The main indoor air triggers are secondhand smoke, dust mites, cockroaches and animal dander.”

Here are some of the most common asthma triggers found in Minnesota, with tips on how to reduce your exposure:

- **Tobacco smoke:** Don’t smoke inside your home, or allow others to do so. Even the smell of tobacco on clothing can trigger an asthma episode.
- **Animal dander:** All breeds of cats and dogs, regardless of hair length, shed dander that can trigger allergies and asthma. Keeping pets with fur or feathers out of the house is the best step. The next best step is keeping them out of bedrooms. Washing the pet weekly can help, if you are committed to keeping a cat or dog.
- **Dust mites:** Keep the relative humidity levels in your home at 50 percent or below to inhibit the growth of dust mites. Wash your child's bed covers, clothes, and stuffed toys weekly in hot (130 degrees F) water.
- **Ozone:** Watch for local advisories on ozone, and plan on limiting outdoor activities on the few days each year when outdoor air advisories are in effect. For more details, visit <http://aqi.pca.state.mn.us/hourly/>.
- **Pollens:** Have your child stay indoors when the pollen count is high. Use air conditioning, if possible. Keep windows closed during seasons of high pollen counts.

Statewide activities planned

A model home 6819 Oliver Avenue South, Richfield, Minn. that was constructed using American Lung Association guidelines to reduce indoor air asthma triggers will be open for free public tours during the Richfield Beautiful’s 2004 Home and Garden Tour on **Saturday, June 26, from 10 a.m. until noon.** To register, email ginaoconnell@alamn.org or call (651) 268-7614.

A variety of statewide activities are being held in conjunction with Asthma Awareness Day and throughout May, which is Asthma Awareness Month. These include an Asthma

Awareness Walk in St. Cloud, a public workshop on reducing indoor asthma triggers in Richfield, and a “Wheeze Day” event in Willmar. A complete activities list can be found on the Minnesota Asthma Coalition Web site at www.mnasthma.org.

More information about asthma can be obtained from the following organizations:

- American Lung Association Call Center. Call 1-800-548-8252 to talk to a RN or respiratory therapist about your asthma issues.
- Minnesota Asthma Information Center
www.alamn.org/InfoCenter/
- Minnesota Asthma Coalition
www.alamn.org/mnasthma
- Minnesota Department of Health Asthma Web Page
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma