Way to Grow!
Health Information from Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters

PEDIATRIC AFFILIATES OF
HAMPTON ROADS
200 GRAYSON RD., STE. 101
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23462
PH: 473-3200 FAX: 473-0459

April 2001
0422

Dust Mite Allergy

What are dust mites?

The dust mite is a microscopic insect-like creature which is found in homes. It lives primarily in pillows, mattresses, box springs, carpets, stuffed toys, and upholstered furniture. It thrives in warm, humid conditions. It eats scales which are shed from human skin. The waste product particles of the dust mite are the main substances in house dust that causes reactions in people. These particles continue to cause allergic symptoms even after the mite that has produced them has died.

Where are dust mites found?

The greatest source of dust mite exposure in the home is found in:

- Bedroom mattresses
- Pillows
- Box springs

These areas provide the best conditions of warmth, humidity, and food for growth of the dust mites. They are also present in:

- Blankets
- Carpets
- Upholstered furniture
- Curtains and similar fabrics
- Stuffed toys

How are dust mites eliminated?

Studies have shown that reducing dust mite allergen exposure in the bedroom leads to a decrease in allergic symptoms and a decreased need for medication. The bedroom is where people spend one third or more of their day and the bedroom is the room with the greatest number of dust mites.

Follow these steps to eliminate dust mites and their waste products:

1. Cover the **mattress, pillow, and box spring** of the bed in which your child sleeps with covers that are labeled "allergen impermeable". These are zippered enclosed covers. (See Types of Covers, next page.)

2. Wash sheets, blankets, pillowcases, and other bedding in **hot water** every 7 to 14 days.

3. Vacuum frequently with the child out of the room. Using a vacuum with a **HEPA** filter will help. If your vacuum cleaner does not have a HEPA filter, purchase **multi-thick/allergen proof/multi-layered or double-thick** vacuum bags. (Look for the words in bold on the label, these bags will work as well.)

4. Avoid dust collectors such as stuffed animals in your child's bed. These toys should be washed in hot water or placed in a freezer overnight every couple of weeks. Store them in a plastic storage tub with a lid. Leave out only the special toys that your child cannot part with.

Types of Covers

Vinyl Encasings are the least expensive. These are good for children who do not remain dry through the night. These can be stiff, noisy, and sweaty, however. The vinyl encasings are an inexpensive cover to use for the box spring.

Laminates are one step up from the vinyl casings. These covers are made by laminating (fusing) a plastic-type membrane to fabric. The plastic side is next to the pillow or mattress and the cloth side is next to the pillowcase or sheet. These may not "breathe" very well. With repeated washing, the urethane/plastic membrane can separate from the fabric. This is the type found in most department stores.

Microfibers are the newest type of fabrics. These high-tech fabrics are thin and have yarns woven together tightly so that there is no space for allergens to pass through. Air and water vapor can pass through, so these tend to be more comfortable to sleep on. Not all microfibers are the same. If you hold the cover up to the light, the less light you can see the better. Less light passes through tighter woven fibers. Very tight fiber covers can greatly reduce dust mite allergen as well as cat dander that may have accumulated in the bedding. Recommended manufacturers include:
www.missionallergy.com or 1-877-NOALLERGY and www.allergycontrol.com or 1-800-422-DUST.

Where to purchase recommended products

1. Product catalogs and the Internet. Prices vary depending on size and quality.

2. Local department stores that carry these products:
   - K-Mart, Roses, Target: Carry all sizes of covers in vinyl (plastic-like)
   - Wal-Mart: Carries vinyl and waffle-weave cloth product
   - Sears and Penney's: Carry both vinyl and cloth, all sizes and price ranges
   - Specialty Shop (Bed, Bath and Beyond): Carries both vinyl and cloth, all sizes are available

Remember to shop around your area, prices vary.

" This information is of a general nature and is not intended to serve as a substitute for the advice of a physician or other qualified health care provider." **©2001**