

House dust mites



About dust mites

Dust mites are microscopic creatures that feed off human skin scales. They are one of the most common allergen triggers for asthma, especially in humid and coastal parts of Australia.

They live in soft furnishings such as beds, bedding, carpets, upholstered furniture, soft toys and clothing, and are mostly found in people's homes rather than public places.

Dust mites are not usually in the air and only become airborne during and after dust-raising activities such as vacuuming and dusting.

Reducing your exposure

If you have a proven allergy to house dust mites, you may be advised to take measures to try to reduce your exposure. This involves killing house dust mites, removing the allergen they produce and reducing areas where they can live and breed.

In the bedroom

Steps to reduce exposure should focus on your bedroom, as the greatest exposure to house dust mites is from your bed. Some useful measures are:

- Open the curtains and air your bedding in the sunshine

- Wash sheets and pillow cases weekly in water hotter than 55 °C
- Cover your mattress, quilt and pillows with mite-resistant cases, and wash these regularly
- Remove untreated underlays
- Remove soft toys from the bedroom, or wash them weekly in water hotter than 55 °C – note freezing soft toys overnight kills the mites but doesn't remove the allergen

Why a hot wash?

Washing bedding in water hotter than 55 °C will kill mites and wash away the allergen they produce.

If you can't wash in hot water, use a commercial product containing essential oils such as tea tree or eucalyptus, formulated to kill dust mites in cold water. Hot tumble drying of washed items for 10 minutes after they are dry will also kill mites.

Dry cleaning is not as effective as it will kill house dust mites but won't remove the allergen.

Around the house

- Use a damp or electrostatic cloth to dust hard surfaces, including hard floors
- Vacuum carpets and soft furnishings weekly, using a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter vacuum cleaner if possible
- Ask someone else to do the vacuuming while you leave the room, as vacuuming (even with a HEPA filter vacuum) increases the amount of dust mite allergen in the air for up to 20 minutes
- Reduce indoor humidity by having a dry and well ventilated home with floor and wall insulation and no evaporative coolers or unflued gas heaters
- Remember to clean window coverings (blinds and curtains) regularly
- Consider house dust mite avoidance measures when building or renovating your home