warm home, healthy family



Keeping your home cosy and dry this winter is vital. Cold, damp homes are the leading cause of asthma, chest coughs and colds. Insulation and effective heating is the key to a healthy family this winter.

Living in a dry and warm environment is essential for your family's good health. During the wintertime, dampness, draughts and a lack of insulation make our homes more difficult to heat. Aim to keep the temperature at least 18°C throughout your house (room temperatures under 16°C are considered harmful).

insulation

Insulation is considered to be one of the most important things you can do to keep your home warm and dry. Unfortunately, many older houses in New Zealand were built without insulation. Insulating your ceiling and under the floor is a low-cost option to keep the heat in, and has an added bonus of reducing your heating costs, as the warmth actually stays in your house. Be aware though that if your insulation was installed a long time ago, it may no longer be doing its job properly, so it pays to check how old it is. There is government funding available to help with the costs of insulating and heating your house. Details can be found at www.energywise.govt.nz.

mould-free

Keeping your house warm and dry also has the added bonus of avoiding mould and dampness which is really unhealthy. If you do have any patches of mould within your house, ensure you remove it quickly using very diluted household bleach. Use extractor fans in your kitchen and bathroom, and dry your clothes outside.

curtains

Floor-length curtains (or properly fitted pelmets) will help keep the heat in far more effectively than free-hanging curtains, and pulling your curtains before dusk also make a big differenceto your home's internal temperature. You should also consider using draught excluders under doors (think: retro draught snake) and draught-proofing strips around windows and doors; as well as double-glazing your windows and insulating your hot water cylinder.

allergies

Minimising allergens in your home is another good starting point to keeping your family healthy this winter. Watch carefully for allergy triggers in your children. These could be anything from foods to cigarette smoke, pets to dust mite faeces. If someone in your family does suffer from asthma or has an allergy to dust mite faeces (very common), one of the most effective things to do is use a special bedding cover which provides a barrier to these nasties. Vacumming regularly is essential and having the right type of filter in your vacuum cleaner is very important. Vacuum cleaners with a micro-filter, an S-class filter, or an HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter system are the best. Direct sunlight kills dust mites, so hang your washing out in the sun to dry, and air your blankets, duvets and rugs weekly. For children's soft toys or cuddlies, wash them regularly and either dry in the sun or put them in the deep freeze for 24-48 hours every few weeks, as this will kill the dust mites.

heat pumps

Thermostatically controlled heaters are good for maintaining a constant temperature in your home, and as such, heat pumps in particular have seen a dramatic rise in popularity lately. Heat pumps are an efficient form of heating, although there are significant differences between models and brands. It is important to get one that is a good fit for the size of the area that you want to heat. Learning to use the timer features and regularly cleaning the filters will ensure your heat pump is more efficient

10 TOP TIPS FOR A HEALTHY HOME

1. Insulate your ceiling and under floor
2. Reduce dust mites
3. Keep your house smoke-free
4. Remove any mould
5. Use electric or flued gas heaters only
6. Air your house on fine days
7. Dry your clothes outside
8. Keep room temperatures to a minimum of 18°C
9. Fix leaky taps, guttering and wet areas around your home
10. Consider double-glazing for your windows

Parents can get a Child Asthma Plan from www.asthmafoundation.org.nz or contact their nearest Asthma Society.