

House Dust Mites and Allergic Disease

1. What are House Dust Mites?

House dust mites are ubiquitous in our environment. They are microscopic - invisible to the naked eye. They feed off skin flakes that we all shed continuously. The antigen that causes problems for allergic people is present in the mite faeces. This allergen is an important factor that can contribute to asthma, eczema and allergic rhinitis. Patients with asthma, eczema or allergic rhinitis who are allergic to house dust mite allergen can benefit from reduced exposure to the dust mite antigen.

2. How can we avoid house dust mites?

House dust mites cannot be eliminated from our surroundings. However, we can reduce the number of mites and the amount of allergen in our surroundings by modifying our environment. Efforts are mainly focused on the bedroom, especially on the bed, as this is where your child spends up to 10 hours each day.

3. Environmental modifications that help reduce exposure to house dust mite antigen

- Wash all bedding in hot (>55° C) water weekly
- Remove all soft toys and soft furnishings from the bedroom
- Remove any woollen underlay from the bed
- Vacuum carpet or mop floors weekly
- Wet dust surfaces weekly
- Place mattress, doona and pillow in dust mite encasings eg Allersearch (available from some chemists or tel: 1800 269 534), **Mite Guard** (tel: 1800 688 148), Allergend (tel: 9817 7582).

4. Should we remove our carpets?

The importance of removing carpets is controversial and this is not generally recommended in the first instance. Removing carpets is expensive and a major imposition to most families. As the dust mite allergen is relatively heavy and rises less than 2 feet off the ground when disturbed, a reasonable approach is to discourage children from sitting or lying on carpeted floors. Since children spend up to 10 hours each day sleeping, it is better to focus dust mite avoidance measures on the bed.

5. Air filters and Acaricide sprays are not recommended

- Air filters do not impact upon dust mite levels in the environment as dust mite allergen is relatively heavy and does not remain airborne for any length of time. Air filters are expensive and are not recommended for reduction of dust mite allergen.
- Acaricide sprays are chemicals that are toxic to dust mites. They only reduce dust mite numbers for short periods of time and must be applied frequently. They do NOT reduce levels of the dust mite allergen. Acaricide sprays are difficult to use and expensive.