



SPOTLIGHT 2019: Indoor Air Quality in Schools

Indoor air quality (IAQ) in schools can impact children's health and how well they perform in school.¹

In the United States, more than 53 million children and 6 million adults spend a large part of their days in more than 120,000 public and private schools. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), indoor air is more polluted than outside air. And a lot of evidence shows that poor IAQ increases risks of severe asthma attacks and allergic reactions.²

Some of the most common allergens found in schools are dust mites, pests and mold. These can trigger asthma symptoms in people with allergic asthma. Asthma is the leading cause of missed school days.

The aging infrastructure of our public school system is one of the top causes of poor IAQ in schools. In 2017, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave U.S. public schools a D+ on its Infrastructure Report Card. Annual funding to keep up school buildings falls about \$38 billion short.

The report card notes that 53% of the nearly 100,000 public school buildings need repairs, renovations and modernizations just to be considered in "good" condition.³ School districts with more low-income and minority children are more likely to report their school buildings as being in "poor" or "fair" condition.⁴

Sadly, no states have tried to improve school IAQ according to any of AAFA's four IAQ core policy standards since the 2014 State Honor Roll™ report. Individual schools and school districts do put in place environmental policies and practices without state mandates. But without funding, many schools are limited in the steps they can take. Increasing teacher and parent awareness of how important IAQ is to the safety of students is a low-cost first step that could have a big impact.

The EPA suggests that parents watch for these signs that IAQ is affecting their child's health:

- Your child complains about asthma or allergy symptoms during certain times of the day or week
- Other students in the same area have similar issues
- Your child feels better when they leave the school but has symptoms again when they return
- The school has recently been renovated or refurnished
- Your child recently started working with new or different materials or equipment at school
- The school started using new cleaning or pesticide products or practices
- Smoking is allowed in the school
- The classroom adopts a new warm-blooded animal⁵

Teachers also can work to improve IAQ in their own classrooms. The EPA created a [Teacher's Classroom Checklist](#). Teachers can use this tool to take steps to manage classroom IAQ. AAFA also offers a classroom tool, [Ally & Andy's Awesome Asthma & Allergy Activities book](#). Teachers can use it to raise awareness about asthma and allergies for all students. It is a fun way for children to learn about common asthma and allergy triggers and bring greater awareness to the classroom.



References

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3. Ironcore. (n.d.). ASCE's 2017 American Infrastructure Report Card: GPA: D. Retrieved from <https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org>
4. BuildUSschools.org. (2018, September). Education Equity Requires Modern School Facilities. Retrieved August 15, 2019.
5. Parents and Students and Healthy Indoor School Environments. (2017, March 06). Retrieved from <https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/parents-and-students-and-healthy-indoor-school-environments>