

Indoor Air Quality

THO Manual | August 2026

The air inside homes, schools and other buildings may contain pollutants that can affect human health, such as carbon monoxide, radon, tobacco smoke, chemicals from household cleaning products, mold and pet dander. Breathing in air pollutants can lead to allergies, infections, asthma and other health problems that involve the lungs, nose and throat.

If you get questions about indoor air quality in a private home, share the information and resources on the Health Department's [indoor air quality website](#) or refer them to the Environmental Health Division at 800-439-8550.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact AHS.VDHTHO@vermont.gov.

Indoor Air Pollutants

Radon

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that has no color, smell or taste. Radon can enter your home through the foundation. Radon levels can build up indoors – especially in winter months when the heat is on and homes are closed up. Breathing in radon can increase your risk of lung cancer, especially if you smoke.

Testing is the only way to know if radon is present in a home. We recommend testing homes for 3 to 12 months (ideally including winter months) with a long-term radon in air test kit. Long-term test kits are best because the amount of radon in a home can change daily, weekly and seasonally. [Order radon test kits online](#) or call 802-338-4736 or 800-660-9997 (toll-free in Vermont). Learn more at HealthVermont.gov/radon.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that has no color, smell or taste. CO can build up to dangerous levels indoors when fuel-burning devices are not properly operated, vented or maintained. Common sources of CO in homes include furnaces, heaters or woodstoves, generators (which should only be operated outdoors at least 20 feet away from a home), vehicle exhaust from an attached garage and tobacco smoke.

CO can cause headaches, dizziness, nausea, fatigue and can even lead to death. **Anyone with possible CO poisoning symptoms should leave their building immediately and call 9-1-1.** Local fire departments have the safety equipment necessary to enter the building, determine the risk of CO poisoning, and fix the problem.

CO alarms are required in all new and existing multi-family and rental dwellings as part of the [Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code](#). CO alarms are also required to be installed in owner-occupied dwellings for units that have been built, sold or exchanged since 2005.

For more information, contact the [Division of Fire Safety's regional office](#) in your area. Visit HealthVermont.gov/CO to learn more.

Mold

Mold is a general term used to describe certain types of fungi. There are many different types of molds that vary in color and appearance. No species of mold is named “[black mold](#).”

Mold needs moisture to grow. When materials and surfaces become wet, mold can start to grow within 48 hours. Mold may also grow in areas with high humidity that do not have visible water or moisture problems. **Fixing water and moisture problems is the key to controlling mold growth.**

Mold commonly grows in bathrooms without vents or windows, basements with dirt floors and rooms that are not properly ventilated — especially kitchens and laundry rooms. Mold grows well on drywall, paper products, cardboard, ceiling tiles and wood products. Mold can also grow on dust, paints, wallpaper, insulation, carpet, fabric and upholstery.

The health effects of mold can vary. Mold exposure may lead to asthma attacks, headaches, fatigue, eye and skin irritation and allergic reactions. Mold allergies can lead to more severe conditions. People with weakened immune systems or breathing problems may be at greater risk of getting a serious lung infection. Although rare, respiratory fungal infections can occur when fungus grows inside the lungs.

The issues that lead to mold growth (structural and moisture problems) are a part of the [Rental Housing Health and Safety Code](#).

Testing for mold is not necessary or recommended. Test results cannot be used to say a building is “safe” or “unsafe.” If mold is visible or has an odor, then there most likely is a mold problem. No matter how much or what kind of mold is in your home or building, the action steps are the same:

1. Remove the moldy items.
2. Dry the space out.
3. Fix the water or moisture problem.

You can reference the [Mold Inside Homes and Other Buildings](#) fact sheet and learn more at HealthVermont.gov/mold.

Tobacco Smoke

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. It increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, and respiratory illness in people who do not smoke. Thirdhand

smoke is also a risk when leftover pollutants are re-emitted from surfaces like carpets or upholstered furniture.

Vermont laws limit smoking, vaping, and the use of other tobacco products in many public places, including:

- Indoor public places such as restaurants, bars, hotels, and retail stores.
- Common areas of public housing, multi-unit rental properties, and publicly owned buildings. Learn more at [Secondhand Smoke in Multiunit Housing](#).
- Within 25 feet of state-owned and leased buildings.
- Public school grounds, school-sponsored events, and licensed childcare facilities while children are present.
- Many workplaces, which may also adopt stricter smoke-free policies.

Public housing designated by HUD must also be smoke-free, including within 25 feet of building entrances.

Towns may adopt smoke-free rules that are more restrictive than state law, such as prohibiting smoking in parks and playgrounds.

Property owners and managers are responsible for enforcing smoke-free laws on their property. If someone refuses to stop smoking or leave, they may contact local law enforcement. Private rental properties and condominium associations may also adopt smoke-free policies. Learn how with the [Smoke- and Vape-Free Housing Toolkit](#).

Town Health Officer Role

Town health officers can help by informing property owners, landlords, and businesses about applicable smoke-free laws and directing them to Health Department resources at HealthVermont.gov/wellness/tobacco. The Vermont Department of Health also provides smoke-free housing guidance, free signage, and support through local health offices and [community coalitions](#) that help communities reduce tobacco use.

Contacts and Additional Resources

For inquiries about mold and radon, contact the Environmental Health Division at 800-439-8550.

For general inquiries about tobacco and smoking, contact tobaccovt@vermont.gov or reach out to your [Local Health Office](#). For **free** help quitting all forms of tobacco, visit 802Quits.org.