

ENVIRONMENTAL HOME

Keys to prevent sick people from getting sicker

By Dan Howard

For TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

Most of us have heard the saying that “a hospital is no place for a sick person.”

Not only is it a “mom-approved” saying, there are plenty of statistics that bear that wisdom out.

The dirty truth is that not only are hospitals “no place for sick people,” so are a lot of our homes, workplaces, schools and other buildings.

The “sick get sicker” equation in hospitals is the same for sick buildings. There are an abundance of contagions, contaminants, bacteria and viruses. There are also people at greater risk for disease in hospitals and many sick buildings.

Infection, contagion and contaminant control is essential in any building, especially those occupied or visited by people who at high risk for illness. Some of those at-risk people include:

- Chemotherapy patients
- Autoimmune disease patients
- Immunosuppressed patients
- Organ transplant patients
- Respiratory patients
- Cardiovascular patients
- Senior citizens
- People recovering from surgical procedures

Environmental exposure

Would you let a poisonous snake bite you just because you had the anti-venom? You also probably would not want to go into a snake pit. Sick buildings are snake pits for people.

You or someone you care about might be doing exactly that on a daily basis. That’s what we are doing when we do not identify and correct environmental risks in sick buildings.

This is especially important when high risk individuals are exposed. If you have a child with asthma, mold



Recent news might have some people concerned about the risk of becoming sick while in the hospital, but many of the same problems that can occur in a health-care facility can strike in your home.

can be a problem. Organ transplant patients have the same risk. If mold exposure can lead to death in a hospital, it can do the same at home or work.

Start with your provider

Many medical resources and practices are available that include a holistic care approach. As an example, most highly successful cancer treatment centers have earned that reputation through that approach.

The secret to managing disease is looking at the key factors that most influence its onset and course. Those factors are nutrition, lifestyle, genetics and environment.

The healthcare community recognizes the importance of looking at those factors instead of only treating symptoms. Medical facilities, practitioners and insurance companies are addressing the first three with new programs and financial incentives.

Some of the most miraculous innovations in healthcare and

maintaining quality of life have been in those four areas.

Problems not always evident

The environmental part of health care is often the most difficult to address for a number of reasons.

Patients often do not know about exposures in their homes, and sick patients often are less observant or conscientious about their exposures.

Medical practitioners, meanwhile, can’t follow the patient home to check the house, and patients can’t describe everything in their house that might be a hazard.

There also is a shortage of environmental professionals trained and experienced at evaluating buildings.

News stories and current events have made us keenly aware of the wide variety of home, workplace and public building environmental problems. Some of them include mold, allergens, Legionella, pesticides, formaldehyde, rodent feces, drug residue, sewage contaminants

and a host of others.

Improper construction and product defects are another category of environmental concerns that need to be checked.

This can include defective furnaces, improper plumbing installation, roof or foundation leaks, stored chemicals, spills and gaseous materials, peeling paint, deteriorating asbestos products, sewage problems and thousands of other problems.

We have hundreds of materials in every building, and each should be considered when evaluating the potential for health problems.

Get independent consultation

Finding a professional to check for all possible exposures isn’t a simple task. The first requirement for many people and businesses is confidentiality. If this is important to you, make that the first question you ask.

The environmental professional needs to have an understanding of mechanical systems, especially

HVAC issues and practices. Building science, including building materials, is a critical skill for this profession.

It is important to have an individual who is qualified to test for a wide array of contaminants. Many testing individuals only perform spore trap mold testing; few are qualified for viable testing, including bacteria. VOC testing and recognition of potential contaminant sources is also critical. Recognition of risks such as asbestos and lead are important skills that are required.

Most clients need an assessment of what the lab results mean in terms of exposure and an evaluation of possible solutions. Simply forwarding lab reports is not adequate for most situations. Lab results should be accompanied by explanations or remediation suggestions.

Beware of remediators that offer testing for their specific services, especially when they are free. These results are often geared to generate work, not solve the client’s problems. They often only consider the type of work that the contractor performs and ignore other problems and solutions.

When looking for an environmental consultant, look for experience and a wide range of services. Consider the professional’s experience, capabilities and willingness to work with medical professionals. Friends, associates and your medical practitioner are good referral sources for finding these independent environmental assessment professionals.

For links and additional information about holistic medicine and environmental professionals go to Envirospect.com/FindProfessionals.

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