

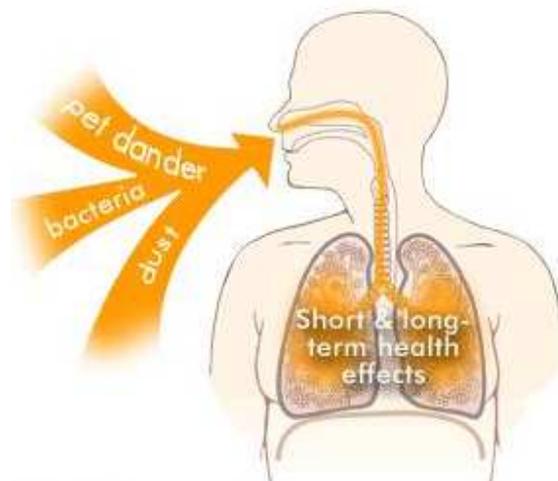


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Indoor Environmental Quality

"Indoor Environmental Quality," as the name implies, simply refers to the quality of the air in an office or other building environments. People spend a lot of time indoors -- for example, many office workers will spend their entire working day inside buildings. People working indoors often experience symptoms such as headaches, shortness of breath, coughing or nausea just to mention a few. However, it is rarely possible to prove that these symptoms are related to a particular indoor air contaminant. In fact, building occupants are simultaneously exposed to a wide range of indoor air contaminants. Workers are often concerned that they have symptoms or health conditions from exposures to contaminants in the buildings where they work. One reason for this concern is that their symptoms often get better when they are not in the building. While research has shown that some respiratory symptoms and illnesses can be associated with damp buildings, it is still unclear what measurements of indoor contaminants show that workers are at risk for disease. In most instances where a worker and his or her physician suspect that the building environment is causing a specific health condition, the information available from medical tests and tests of the environment is not sufficient to establish which contaminants are responsible. Despite uncertainty about what to measure and how to interpret what is measured, research shows that building-related symptoms are associated with building characteristics, including dampness, cleanliness, and ventilation characteristics.



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Indoor environments are highly complex and building occupants may be exposed to a variety of contaminants (in the form of gases and particles) from office machines, cleaning products, construction activities, carpets and furnishings, perfumes, cigarette smoke, water-damaged building materials, microbial growth (fungal / mold and bacterial), insects, and outdoor pollutants. Other factors such as indoor temperatures, relative humidity, and ventilation levels can also affect how individuals respond to the indoor environment.

Understanding the sources of indoor environmental contaminants and controlling them can often help prevent or resolve building-related worker symptoms. Practical guidance for improving and maintaining the indoor environment is available.

Workers who have persistent or worsening symptoms should seek medical evaluation to establish a diagnosis and obtain recommendations for treatment of their condition.

It is common for people to report one or more of the following symptoms:

- dryness and irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, and skin,
- headache,
- fatigue,
- shortness of breath,
- hypersensitivity and allergies,
- sinus congestion,
- coughing and sneezing,
- dizziness, and/or
- nausea.

People generally notice their symptoms after several hours at work and feel better after they have left the building or when they have been away from the building for a weekend or a vacation.

Many of these symptoms may also be caused by other health conditions including common colds or the flu, and are not necessarily due to poor IAQ. This fact can make identifying and resolving IAQ problems more difficult.



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