Indoor Air Quality and Health in FEMA Temporary Housing

For Healthcare Providers

Background

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is responding to local residents' concerns about formaldehyde and air quality in FEMA trailers.

This fact sheet provides basic information on formaldehyde exposure, other air quality concerns, risk factors and tips to give to trailer residents so they can improve air quality in their trailers. This fact sheet also outlines CDC's air quality studies.

About CDC

CDC is a federal public health agency based in Atlanta, GA. Our mission is to promote health and quality of life by preventing and controlling disease, injury and disability.

Introduction

Formaldehyde is one of many pollutants that can affect indoor air quality in FEMA trailers. Mold, pesticides, cleaning chemicals and tobacco smoke also can significantly reduce the quality of indoor air. The confined spaces within the trailers make air quality concerns worse.

Who Is Most At Risk

Poor air quality causes problems for everyone. However, people who are more at risk for health problems from poor air quality are:

- People with asthma
- People who have allergies
- People who have chronic lung disease such as bronchitis and emphysema
- People with pre-existing heart disease
- Children
- Elderly

Symptoms

The respiratory symptoms associated with exposure to formaldehyde are similar to the effects of seasonal allergies and exposure to other common indoor air pollutants such as mold or cigarette smoke. Those symptoms include:

- Eye, nose and throat irritation (burning, itching, tearing and sore throat)
- Skin irritation
- Chest tightness, coughing and shortness of breath

Improving Indoor Air Quality

Depending on which trailer your patient lives in, different methods can be used to improve indoor air quality. In general, residents should try to:

- Ventilate the trailer as much as possible
- Clean up any mold and control moisture
- Keep the trailer clean of pet fur and dust
- Spend some time each day outside, if they can
- Avoid smoking inside the trailer

Testing

- There is no clinically useful blood or urine test to determine exposure to formaldehyde.
- CDC tested the air for formaldehyde, in randomly-selected occupied FEMA trailers in Louisiana and Mississippi, in December 2007 and January 2008.The CDC test results are a one-hour sample of formaldehyde in the air inside FEMA-supplied trailers and mobile homes.

Treatment

- There is no antidote or medication for formaldehyde exposure.
- Exposure to formaldehyde can be reduced by following the air quality improvement steps described above or by moving.
- Patients demonstrating symptoms of seasonal allergies or of asthma may benefit from symptomatic treatment.

Health Study

CDC will work with parents to study children to determine whether there has been any health effects associated with living in FEMA trailers. This study is expected to begin later this year.

If you would like more information about indoor air quality and health, please call CDC toll-free at **1-800-CDC-INFO.**