

## Study Finds Parents Overlook Most Important Asthma Steps

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Parents of children with asthma try hard to protect their youngsters but often overlook the most important measures, including banning smoking in the house and shutting windows to keep pollen out, U.S. researchers report.

A quarter of parents surveyed said a smoker lived in the same house as the child with asthma but admitted they had not done anything about it.

Many parents reported they had bought a mattress cover, protecting their child from dust mite allergens, but did not shut windows to keep pollen out of the house -- even when they knew their child's asthma was triggered by pollen.

"Eighty percent of parents in this study knew at least one specific factor that triggered their child's asthma symptoms, and 82 percent of those had devoted some effort to help their children avoid these triggers," said Dr. Michael Cabana, the University of Michigan pediatrician who led the study.

Only half of the 1,788 asthma-proofing steps taken by parents of 896 asthmatic children in the study were likely to work, the researchers reported in the August issue of the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*.

Many tried useless products, they found.

"Parents hear 'Sprinkle this on your carpet' or 'Clean out your air ducts' or 'Buy this air ionizer' and parents who are desperate to help their kids can get misled into spending money on things of questionable value," said Dr. Toby Lewis, who also worked on the report.

"The bottom line is, talk to your doctor before you spend a lot of money, and do the cheap, easy things first," she added.

Doctors need to do more to educate parents about the best ways to prevent asthma attacks, the researchers said.

"The first level of education for parents is to learn that much of asthma occurs as a reaction to triggers in the environment, and that everyone's triggers are different. One of the first steps in getting asthma under control is figuring out a child's triggers," said Lewis.

Some of the potentially harmful things parents were doing included using a humidifier in the room of a child whose triggers include house dust mites. House dust mites thrive in humid environments.