

# ASTHMA & ALLERGY ALERT

A Publication of Asthma & Allergy Affiliates of the North Shore

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## Dust Mite Allergy

House dust mites are a major risk factor for the development of asthma and allergies in adults and children. They also play a major role in exacerbating asthma as well as nasal symptoms.



Dust mites are microscopic creatures that thrive on a diet of dead skin flakes and grow best at high humidity. Both of these conditions occur frequently in the bedroom and, more specifically, the bed. Therefore, most of us will spend 6-8 hours each night exposed to the dust mites and their allergens.

Many people will find their asthma worsens at night due to the dust mites in their bedding. Those with eye and nose allergies will often sneeze at night and complain of crusting of their eyes in the morning. The effects of these creatures also impacts the quality of sleep and leaves many sufferers feeling less than well rested.

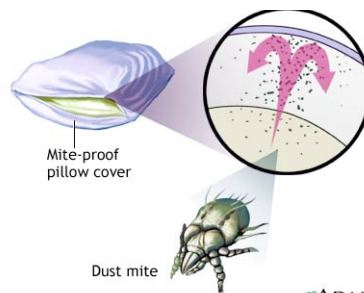
The concentrations of dust mites typically peak in the Fall which correlates with increased humidity levels.

### How to control Dust Mites

The most effective method of reducing house dust mite is allergen-proof encasings for the pillow and mattress. These are tightly-woven fabrics that zip up over the pillow and mattress and remain in place (do not wash the covers). You place your sheets on top of the covers and wash them weekly in hot water

with detergent. Dry cleaning can kill mites but is less effective at removing other allergens (such as cat and dog dander). Also, if you are purchasing a new mattress, choose one with a cotton upper layer

(rather than synthetic) as these allow a lower dust mite population. We do not recommend a foam mattress or topper as these can hold up to 4 times the number of dust mites as a standard mattress.



Less effective measures are vacuum cleaning on a regular basis - though a vacuum with a HEPA filter will decrease your exposure to dust mites when you clean. Remove carpeting and rugs if you are able as these will harbor increased levels of dust mites. Limit the number of stuffed animals on your child's bed. Maintain a clean and uncluttered bedroom. A central dehumidifier that maintains humidity at less than 50% may be of help. The use of dust mite sprays (acaricides) such as benzyl benzoate is not very effective. You should limit cats and dogs from the bedroom as their skin scales serve as added nutrients for the dust mites.

### Where to buy dust mite covers

<http://www.missionallergy.com>

<http://www.achooallergy.com/>

<http://www.natlallergy.com/default.asp>