

# Cleaning and Healthy Air

*“Peek-a-boo!”*

Early childhood is a time of exploration. For four-month-old Eric, that includes using his hands to reach out and touch everything he can.

*“Can you see your face in there? Who’s this baby?”*

*“A normal part of babies’ growth and development is going to be touching things that are going to have bacteria, as a normal part of their environment. So, we want to try and keep every area as clean as possible.”*

What you use to clean is key. Cleaning products should not contain harsh chemicals.

*“We want to use things that have no perfumes, that are biodegradable, that won’t be toxic to the environment, or to our baby’s lungs.”*

That’s especially important because babies often put their hands in their mouths. Eric is no exception according to his mom, Ali.

*“He’s still finding his hands, and he just, I mean, instead of his thumbs, he just gets the whole fist in his mouth. He’s trying to figure out what to do with that.”*

*“If you are using a chemical on a surface to clean, and that child or that baby touches that surface, they’re going to get the chemical on their hands and their fingers, and it’s going to go in their mouth. So, another reason to use things that are not toxic, no chemicals, because we don’t want children to ingest those cleaners.”*

Just as important as cleaning surfaces in the home: clearing the air. Experts recommend vacuuming and dusting *at least* once a week. Also, there should be no smoking!

*“Babies should never be around any kind of cigarette smoke - or any other kind of smoke. That means parents should not be smoking around their babies or their children. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, visitors: absolutely no smoking around children.”*

Other potential indoor air pollutants are not as obvious as cigarette smoke but can still pose a threat. First: carbon monoxide. You can’t see it or smell it. But protecting against it is simple with a carbon monoxide detector. Like a smoke detector, it’s inexpensive and easy to install. Next: mold. It’s caused by dampness in the home, from sources such as a water leak, a broken air conditioner, or flooding.

*“It can trigger asthma, it can lead to ear infections, all kinds of medical problems. So, keeping things dry will decrease the likelihood that the environment will be laden with mold, and mold spores.”*

*“Are you ready?”*

Keeping a home safe for baby requires the participation of everyone in the family. For Eric’s two older sisters, that means that they must wash their hands before playing with him. The same goes for visitors.

*“If they are coming into the house and are going to be playing with him, I’ll ask them just to wash their hands.”*

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Still, as a nurse practitioner, Ali knows that trying to keep babies away from all germs is not possible, or even desirable.

*“It’s important for them to get exposed to some modicum of germs in my mind, and I don’t worry about it.”*

*“Babies are born with an immature immune system. And the way that immune system is going to mature and learn to fight infections is to actually be presented with some bacteria and viruses in the world.”*

While Ali and her husband, Edward, do all they can to make their home safe for the baby, they know from experience that there are limits.

*“Environments aren’t 100% perfect; that’s life and you do your best and you keep your kids safe, but you can’t beat yourself up about everything you can’t possibly get to.”*

*“The truth is, we want to keep everything as clean as we can for our babies, but not at the expense of enjoying their lives. Enjoy them, and they are going to grow up to be healthy and strong in the end.”*