

# Poor air in schools is bad for children

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A June 2000 U.S. Department of Education study in the mid-1990s found 1 in 5 U.S. schools (about 25,000) reported unsatisfactory indoor air quality.

Today, millions of children attend schools plagued by poor indoor air quality caused by mold, toxins, chemicals and other unhealthy environmental factors, causing long-lasting and life-threatening health problems.

Another survey, of school nurses in 2010, found that 40 percent of respondents knew children and staff who had been adversely affected by pollutants in schools. More than 75 percent of surveyed nurses said their schools had no indoor air quality team or coordinator. It has been called “America’s largest unaddressed children’s health crisis”

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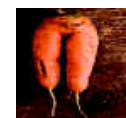
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The World Health Organization in July 2008 reported in "Training for the Health Sector" that "We now recognize, that children, including the embryo, fetus, infant and all life stages until the completion of adolescence, are often at a different and increased risk from environmental hazards from that of adults, for reasons that can be divided into four major categories:"

1. Children often have different, and sometimes unique, exposures to environmental hazards from those of adults.

2. Due to their dynamic developmental physiology, children are often subjected to higher exposures of pollutants found in air, water and food. These exposures may be handled quite differently by an immature set of systems from the way they are dealt with in adults. Furthermore, the developmental component of a child's physiology is changing: maturing, differentiating and growing in phases known as "developmental windows." These "critical windows of vulnerability" have no parallel in adult physiology and create unique risks for children exposed to hazards that can alter normal function and structure.

3. Children have a longer life expectancy. Therefore they have longer to manifest a disease with a long latency period, and longer to live with toxic damage.

4. Finally, children are politically powerless; they are defenseless. Adults have to protect them from toxic environmental agents."

Short-term physical health effects of poor indoor air quality on students include fatigue, nausea, inability to concentrate and impaired memory and focus. Other adverse health effects include asthma and respiratory illnesses, neurological disorders, chemical sensitivities, hormonal disruptions and cancer, according to a 2003 report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on school indoor air quality.

Asthma is on the rise and children miss more than 14 million school days each year. Poor indoor air quality is one of the leading causes of absenteeism for children in the U.S., according to a 2010 EPA report, "Managing Asthma in Schools."

**Daniela Kunz is founder and president of Parents for Students' Safety and lives in Franklin.**

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