



Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec  
Environmental Health Association of Québec

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### **Making a Safe Bedroom for Your Baby**

Preparing a nursery is an exciting step for soon-to-be parents. Many families will be required to undertake some renovations in order to accommodate their home for the arrival of the baby. Since mothers are often involved in this step, it is important to keep their health in mind. During pregnancy, a woman has to be mindful of possible environmental chemical exposures, as substances can easily be transferred to the baby through the placenta and through breast milk. For the fetus and newborns, exposures to toxic components can lead to many negative health impacts, with some even have repercussions later in life. This is why it is important to take extra precautions during home renovations, especially in older homes. Here are some steps that can be taken to create a safe environment for the mother and her future child.

**Limit the exposure to harmful dust.** Housing renovations are considered to be a source of indoor environmental pollution. Current studies show that indoor volatile organic compound (VOC) concentrations are higher after undertaking renovation activities. VOCs are found in various construction items such as floor coverings, building materials, window dressings and new

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furniture. Removal of older materials during renovations can cause VOCs, dust and mould to be released in the indoor environment, increasing the risk of exposure. Prenatal exposure to air pollution can result in infants being more prone to asthma, eczema and allergies early on in life. Some studies also show a relationship between maternal exposure to housing renovations and the increased risk of Congenital Heart Disease in newborns. Therefore, if you are partaking in major remodeling, it is preferable to follow some guidelines which are mentioned below.

**Stay informed about the materials present in your house.** When planning to demolish walls or remove flooring, families need to watch out for hidden dangers such as mold or harmful materials. Older homes can contain materials that are no longer considered safe to use in homes such as lead-based paints or asbestos. Paint used in the interior of homes built before the 1960s can contain lead. Lead exposure can arise from any disturbance such as removal and repair as it can create dust or paint chips. These exposures should be completely avoided during pregnancy as lead poisoning can cause brain and nervous system damage to the fetus. If you find lead paint in your home and the paint is in good condition, simply covering it with wallpaper, wallboard or paneling provides protection from exposure. If the paint must be removed, it is important to follow recommendation from Health Canada (<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/home-safety/lead-based-paint.html>). Another harmful material that can be found during renovations is asbestos. This material was used in homes before the 1990s. Although there are no studies on the impact of asbestos on the fetus, it is known that its exposure can lead to negative health impacts for the rest of the family. The danger arises when breathing in asbestos particles. This can lead to difficulty breathing, scarring of lung tissue and cancer. Due to the



high risk associated with this material, a professional is required to remove it before continuing with the rest of the renovations.

**Use a zero-VOC paint.** An easy way to redecorate a room to accommodate the new baby without requiring major renovation activities is simply to paint it. However, traditional paints release VOCs. As mentioned earlier, exposure to VOCs can be harmful for a fetus. Some zero-VOC paints are available which are completely safe for pregnant women, children as well as individuals with chemical sensitivities.

**Some guidelines for healthy renovations:** Seal off the area from the rest of the house; make sure that there is no sign of mould before you start the work so that it can be cleaned safely. If the mould present is significant or on a large area, call a professional for safe removal. Ensure that there are no known toxins such as lead and asbestos present (seek professional help for safe removal). It is important to carry out renovations only at times of the year when the windows can be opened for ventilation and off gassing of chemicals during the renovation and after the work has been completed and until there is no odour of new renovations. Choose only least-toxic and /or healthy products and other materials including furniture that off-gas quickly. Finally, anyone carrying out the renovations should always wear a mask. An expectant mother should not be exposed to renovations. However, if there is no choice, then the above guidelines should be followed making sure that it is a small project, using only zero-VOC products, involving very little to no dust and making sure that she takes all precautions to protect herself and her baby. There are many healthy products that are available on the market. Refer to our guide to learn more about these options.



For more information:

<https://www.ecohome.net/guides/2361/choosing-safe-paints/>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/air-quality/indoor-air-contaminants/health-risks-asbestos.html>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/home-safety/lead-based-paint.html>

[https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1600-0668.2009.00631.x?casa\\_token=HG8Gf1ZRIEAAAAA%3AIOBAn1A06-hvdpdQNZLKYUCDa\\_nThBug8TqmjnehcV9U5qi6-Wi6oo9qa0EXRaFqKucO4kDM9njVgqVI](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1600-0668.2009.00631.x?casa_token=HG8Gf1ZRIEAAAAA%3AIOBAn1A06-hvdpdQNZLKYUCDa_nThBug8TqmjnehcV9U5qi6-Wi6oo9qa0EXRaFqKucO4kDM9njVgqVI)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4626367/>

<https://pulse.seattlechildrens.org/the-dangers-of-home-renovation-keep-kids-safe-during-repairs/>