

The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Promote Healthy Homes



ACTIONS

Actions for Government

Communities have a variety of policies and laws accessible for creating and maintaining healthy homes, including voluntary efforts, regulatory authority, and formal relationships between homes and health professionals. Decisions made at the local, state, and federal levels also can help create homes that are affordable and that improve people's health.

Examples of actions government can take include the following:

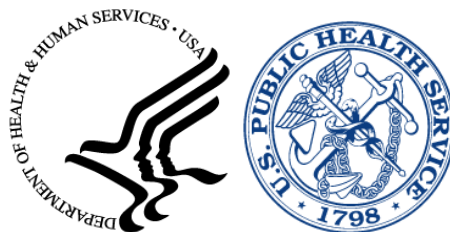
- Develop and improve upon response plans for extreme weather events (e.g., when use of generators, candles, fireplaces, chain saws, and grills increases) that include education and interventions to prevent dangerous exposures and injuries and incorporate these plans into the health and housing programs in their jurisdictions.
- Enforce housing and sanitary code requirements.
- Conduct regular and comprehensive inspections of subsidized properties and require that these units meet basic safety and sanitary requirements.
- Use housing subsidies to promote mixed-income neighborhoods.
- Use market-based incentives to provide economic compensation to promote healthy homes (e.g., compensating property owners for their costs related to healthy and safe home modifications that benefit society at large).
- Model incentives for healthy homes on existing incentives for energy-efficient products.
- Develop data-sharing and consistent criteria across social service and housing agencies for measuring barriers to permanent homes.
- Emphasize prevention of homelessness and target effectively those at highest risk.

Actions for Health Care Providers and Home-Visiting Programs

Health care providers and home-visiting programs can promote a more comprehensive and coordinated approach by incorporating healthy home solutions into their protocols.

Examples of these actions include the following:

- Cross-train home-visit staff to identify and address home deficiencies and assist families living in unstable or unsafe home situations or who are at risk for losing their homes.
- Cross-train home-visit staff to assist elderly, individuals with disabilities and their caregivers, and low-income families with fall prevention measures and the installation and maintenance of smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, and other safety devices.
- Identify and adopt appropriate interventions that have proven successful in nonresidential settings, such as ladder safety standards and training and safety programs designed to prevent hand injury or toxic exposure.



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Actions for Community- and Faith-based Organizations

Community- and faith-based organizations have a critical role in educating at-risk populations about the connection between homes and health and in identifying and addressing home deficiencies.

Examples of actions these organizations can take include the following:

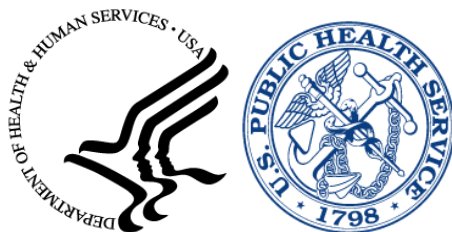
- Support adoption of healthy, safe, accessible, affordable, and environmentally friendly homes.
- Provide home-visiting programs with information on supportive housing for people with mental health problems.
- Inform older adults; people with disabilities; and housing and health care professionals about eligibility and coverage in existing home modification services and products (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid, and Community Development Block Grants).
- Mediate disputes between tenants and property owners to help stabilize rental properties and prevent evictions.
- Adopt “rapid exit” policies in homeless shelters that ensure that families are quickly released and stay housed thereafter.

Actions for Lenders, Developers, and Home Builders and Inspectors

Builders, developers, lenders, and mortgage holders are essential to development of a safe, healthy, affordable, and accessible home portfolio.

Examples of actions these groups can take include the following:

- Train builders in healthy home construction and building management principles.
- Consider health and safety factors when selecting building sites, construction materials, and building systems.
- Apply smart-growth principles to groups of homes and larger communities.
- Develop lending instruments that consider the financial benefits of healthy homes.
- Dedicate a portion of the Community Reinvestment Act funding to support development of safe and healthy homes.
- Train home inspectors to identify and report on a range of safety and health hazards.
- Integrate housing-related strategies including providing a single entry point for determination of eligibility for services that is co-located with intake centers for other social and aging services.
- Work together across agencies and sectors to provide guidance and technical assistance to support safe, healthy, and environmentally friendly housing options.



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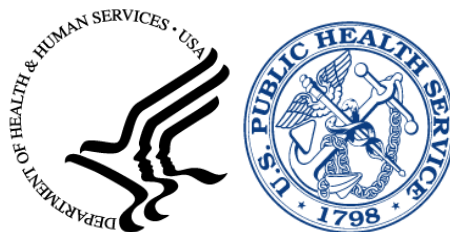


Actions for Individuals, Families, Property Owners, and Maintenance Workers

Persons, families, and property owners can take action to make their homes healthier and more environmentally friendly.

Examples of these actions include:

- Install, maintain, and consistently use safety devices (e.g., smoke alarms; carbon monoxide alarms; stair gates in homes with young children; grab bars in bathrooms; adequate outside lighting; locks on cabinets used to store medicines, cleaning solutions, automotive supplies, firearms and ammunition, pool chemicals, and pesticides; four-sided isolation fencing with self-closing, self-latching doors around pools).
- Complete a home fall-prevention checklist for homes with older adults (see <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/toolkit/ChecklistforSafety.htm>).
- Prepare and practice an emergency fire escape plan (see <http://www.firesafety.gov/citizens/escape/index.shtm>).
- Prepare shelter-in-place and evacuation plans for weather and other disaster situations (visit http://www.redcross.org/preparedness/cdc_english/home.asp for more information).
- Set water temperature in your home below 120°F.
- Routinely check electrical appliances and wiring; replace all worn, old, or damaged appliance cords; do not overload extension cords or wall sockets.
- Check gas appliances, fireplaces, chimneys, and furnaces yearly and change furnace and air conditioning filters regularly. Never use the oven, stove, charcoal burner, or any unvented combustible heat source to heat the house.
- Do not smoke; enforce smoke-free rules in the home. If you do smoke, do not smoke indoors or around children.
- Complete a playground safety checklist if you have playground equipment in your yard (see <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/pg1.pdf>).
- Replace balcony railings spaced greater than 4 inches apart.
- Review the EPA listing of safer cleaning products (see <http://www.epa.gov/dfepubs/projects/formulat/formpartc.htm#consumerclean>) and select the safest products for the job.
- Keep toxic chemicals, including cleaning products and pesticides, away from children. Choose products with poison-prevention packaging.
- Read product labels and follow directions for use and disposal.
- Consider integrated pest management, including natural, biological, and chemical methods with the least impact on health and the environment.
- Control moisture in the home by sealing cracks, directing downspouts away from the house, installing drains near water heaters and washing machines, and properly installing window air conditioner units.

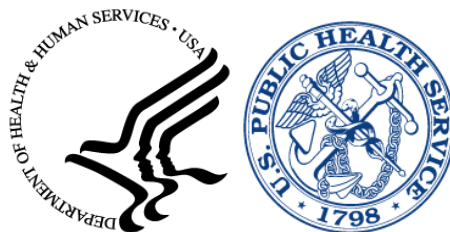


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- Test houses for radon and install a mitigation system if the test result is 4 pCi/L or higher.
- Include radon mitigation systems or radon-resistant construction—or both—in new home construction located in the midwestern and eastern United States.
- Test houses occupied by children less than 6 years of age for lead and control or eliminate lead hazards.
- Make sure that infants sleep on their backs on firm sleeping surfaces.
- Use lead-safe work practices when renovating houses built before 1978.
- Contact the local or state health department for assistance remediating lead or radon hazards.
- Consider green, environmentally friendly options when selecting home sites, materials, and appliances; when building or renovating; and when using natural resources such as water and energy, like those suggested on the EPA's Green Building Web site (<http://www.epa.gov/greenbuilding>)



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