

Your NYCHA Home Affects Your Health!

Part of the NYCHA Real Talk series

This workshop can help you facilitate conversations about mold, lead, and pests in NYCHA buildings and how they affect tenants' short-term and long-term health.

Once the group you're working with understands the basics, you can have a broader discussion about the best ways for NYCHA tenants to hold NYCHA accountable or what tenants want to prioritize fighting for.

Throughout the workshop, there are places to ask the participants questions. We suggest taking answers from a few participant members. Depending on how much time you have for the workshop and how interactive you want it to be, you can have more participants respond.

- Introduce yourself and the purpose of today's workshop. Ask everyone to introduce themselves, it helps warm people up for participating later in the workshop!
- Make sure everyone has the workshop handout. Mention that it summarizes the main ideas, and also has contact information for people who can help.
- If the workshop is taking place virtually:
 - You can either send the handout to participants ahead of time, share it in the chat, or tell participants that the handout will be sent out afterward.
 - Remind participants to leave their camera on so everyone feels like they're in the same room!



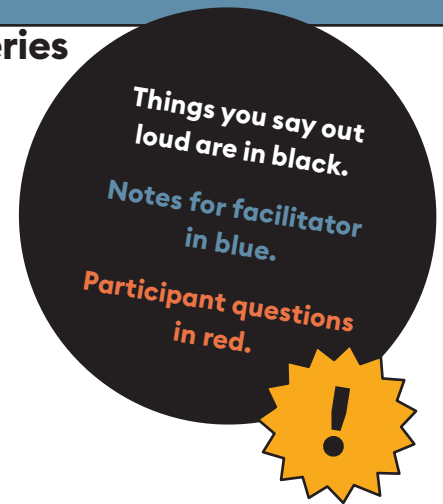
[Slide 1: "Your NYCHA Home Affects Your Health"]

- Today we're going to be talking about how your NYCHA home affects your health.
- Specifically, we'll be discussing three big issues known as "indoor pollutants" – mold, lead, and pests – and what you can do about them.
- Does anyone have experience with any of these issues in your home?



[Slide 2: "Mold, Lead, and Pests"]

- Mold, lead, and pests are very common problems found inside buildings.
- If NYCHA doesn't do regular maintenance to get rid of them, they can make you and your family very sick.



- Can anyone think of health issues that might be caused by having mold, lead, or pests around? (Hint: the answer is on your handout).
 - Some things they may say: asthma, learning disabilities, chronic headaches, other respiratory symptoms, and fevers. If they don't say these, add them into the conversation.
- The health effects include all those things.
- They can hurt your health in the long-term and make you more likely to get other diseases in the future.



[Slide 3: "Mold, Lead, and Pests"]

- As you may already know, many NYCHA apartments have mold, lead, or pest issues.
- NYCHA has been neglecting to fix these issues for many years, which has led to longer lasting issues in apartments, and more health problems for residents.
- NYCHA residents also face harsher impacts during public health emergencies because our health is already compromised.
- We'll go into more detail later, but it's really important to hold NYCHA accountable for making sure you have a healthy home! It's not something you have to tackle alone.
- Right now, we want to share some information on the basics of mold, lead, and pests, and how to spot them in your home.



[Slide 4: "Mold"]

- You may have seen mold in your home or know about the problems it causes.
- Does anyone know where mold grows in the home, or what causes it? (Hint: the answer is on your handout).
 - Mold can grow anywhere there is too much moisture, like where there are leaks, under sinks, or in bathrooms where the windows are closed or the vent is broken.
 - It can grow on hard surfaces like tile, or soft surfaces like carpets or fabric.
- (If anyone said yes to the experience question above re: mold) For the people who've had mold problems, do you remember what it looked like and where you found it?
 - Mold can be many colors, but is normally green, black, or white, and often appears in clusters of dots.
- You may have mold in your home if:
 - You feel sick (chronic headaches, fever or sore throat) or have breathing issues without cold symptoms (like sneezing, sore throat, or a stuffy nose).
 - You see mold spores (clusters of black, brown, or green dots), or notice a musty or damp smell.

- You notice an area that is constantly wet, and a dark brown, black, or green spot has grown around that area (for example, you might see it under a sink).
- Sometimes you may not see it because it's growing under a surface, or in a part of your house you don't see much (like the air ducts or behind the plaster or drywall in your walls).



[Slide 5: "Lead"]

- Lead is very different from other pollutants:
 - **Does anyone know why? (Hint: the answer is on your handout).**
 - Participants may say: you can't see it or smell it!
- It's an invisible poison, so you can't see, smell, or taste it.
- But it can be found in paint, like on your walls and ceilings, and it can also get into your drinking water if your pipes are made of lead.
- You can't tell if your apartment has lead in it just by looking at it! You have to get it tested by NYCHA to find out.
- NYCHA is responsible for testing apartments, especially if children live there!
 - Children 6 years old and younger are most at risk from lead exposure.
 - There are laws that say NYCHA must inspect your home for lead paint if there is a child under 6 years old living there.
 - If there is a child that lives with you or visits often let NYCHA know by filling out the annual questionnaire on NYCHA's Self-Service Portal: <https://selfserve.nycha.info>



[Slide 6: "Pests"]

- Pests are very, very common in all kinds of homes (not just NYCHA).
 - Share an example from your personal experience with pests at home.
- **Who here has experienced pest problems before? Can we get a show of hands if you have?**
- Some common pests you may have seen before are mice and rats, roaches, bedbugs, and other insects.
- They're attracted to food, trash, and moisture.
- Signs of them are:
 - Seeing the pests running around, or noticing signs of them, like droppings, bites, or dead ones.
 - You may also notice food packages have been chewed through.



[Slide 7: “Health Effects”]

- The health effects of all three indoor pollutants are very serious!
- **Do you know what some of them might be?**
- Mold causes breathing problems, contributes to allergies, and can make asthma and other respiratory diseases worse.
- It’s also linked to chronic headaches, fever, nausea and vomiting, and sore throats.
- **It’s especially dangerous** for children, the elderly, and people who are sick.



[Slide 8: “Health Effects”]

- Lead is very, very toxic. It can cause all kinds of problems, including anemia, kidney, nerve, heart, and muscle problems, and even brain damage.
- It’s particularly dangerous to children, and even low levels of lead can hurt their development, leading to learning and behavior problems.
- **There is no safe level of lead.** Any exposure at all is dangerous, and at high enough levels it can be fatal.



[Slide 9: “Health Effects”]

- Exposure to pests can cause many problems, like making asthma worse and spreading other infectious diseases.
- And unfortunately, the pesticides people use to kill pests can also be harmful to your health.



[Slide 10: “What You Can Do About It”]

- We’ve talked a lot about the harmful effects of these indoor pollutants.
- But what can you do about it?
- **NYCHA is responsible for taking care of these issues.**
- We want to emphasize that NYCHA is responsible for taking care of these issues.
- But there are some things you can do to proactively identify mold, lead, and pests, and to prevent yours and your family’s exposure to them.
- For mold:
 - **What has worked for you to identify and prevent exposure to mold, lead, and pests?**
 - Be aware of areas of your house that are usually moist, like kitchens, bathrooms, and behind the fridge/stove, and check them often for mold.
 - Make sure your apartment has good ventilation to keep things dry; keep windows open when you can.
 - Know that mold on hard surfaces can be cleaned with antibacterial soap and water, but soft surfaces like carpet need to be completely replaced and the moisture source has to be removed!



[Slide 11: “What You Can Do About It”]

- For lead:
 - The best/safest thing you can do about lead is get your apartment tested by a NYCHA inspector by notifying NYCHA about peeling, cracked, or loose paint.
 - You should definitely get your apartment tested if you have young children in your home, or if your apartment has peeling paint or was built before 1978.
 - If you can, also make sure to get your children tested for lead at ages 1 and 2. Talk to your primary physician about how to do this.



[Slide 12: “What You Can Do About It”]

- For pests:
 - Keep garbage in sealed bags or containers and take it out every day.
 - Store food in sealed containers as well.
- **Have you tried any of these ways to limit the harmful effects of mold, lead, or pests? Did you find anything particularly useful?**
 - Take answers from 1-3 participants depending on time. Tell participants there is space to take notes in the “Tips from other residents” section of the handout.



[Slide 13: “But NYCHA is responsible...”]

- We’ve talked a little about what you can do to keep yourself safe.
- But ultimately NYCHA is responsible for making sure you have a healthy home, and removing mold, lead, and pests, as well as the things that are causing them. This is the law!



[Slide 14: “Hold NYCHA Accountable”]

- You can contact NYCHA directly by:
 - Putting a ticket in to NYCHA about your mold, lead, or pest issues.
 - **Has anyone tried putting in a ticket? What was your experience like?**
 - Take answers from 1-3 audience members depending on time
- If you have young children, make sure NYCHA knows, so they’ll respond faster! Like we said before, there are laws that say NYCHA must inspect your home for lead paint if there is a child living there under 6 years old.
- When someone shows up to do repairs, demand full repairs, and that they get as much done as possible! You can also demand that they complete repairs quickly.
- Make sure to keep a record of your ticket, the maintenance that was done, any time you contact NYCHA, and when they respond to you. Take photos of the issues too!
- When someone shows up to do lead testing, ask for the exact level of lead in your home, especially if you plan on escalating the issue.

- Has anyone been able to get NYCHA to fix an issue? Do you have any tips that you would recommend to others?

- Take answers from 1-2 audience members depending on time.



[Slide 15: “Escalate the Issue”]

- If NYCHA doesn’t respond to your ticket, or erases the ticket or doesn’t fix the issue, here’s how you can escalate the issue:
 - If you’re having mold and leak issues contact your Mold and Leak Ombudsperson. That is someone NYCHA has appointed especially to deal with mold and leak complaints.
 - Call the Mold and Leak Ombudsperson Call Center at 1-888-341-7152
 - Visit their website at ombnyc.com
 - Keep a record of every time you talk to NYCHA. This can be especially helpful if you plan on escalating to the ombudsperson, Federal Monitor or taking NYCHA to Court.



[Slide 16: “Escalate the Issue”]

- After you put a ticket in, if NYCHA doesn’t respond and fix your issue and you think this is part of a systemic problem, contact the Federal Monitor, who is someone the federal government has appointed especially to deal with these concerns.
 - Email: monitor@nychamonitor.com
 - Phone: 347.809.5555
 - Toll-Free Number: 844.309.6080
- Systemic issues are concerns that many residents have reported to NYCHA but NYCHA has not fixed.
- Has anyone tried contacting the Mold and Leak Ombudsperson or Federal Monitor?



[Slide 17: “If NYCHA isn’t solving your problem...”]

- Unfortunately, the reality is that NYCHA may not solve your problem quickly, or even get to your ticket.
- NYCHA has cut back on funding for maintenance, and their ticketing system is old and overwhelmed with requests.
- Finding long lasting solutions to these problems will take systemic change, and there are other ways to fight for a healthy home, alongside other residents in your building.
- As we go through these strategies, if you hear the names of anyone you want to contact or any links you want to check out, there’s space to write them on your handout under “People I want to contact” section.



[Slide 18: “Organize With Your Neighbors”]

- Chances are the problems you are experiencing are not just happening inside your apartment:
 - NYCHA is more likely to respond to complaints from multiple units in the same buildings.
 - Get to know your neighbors, and ask them if they are having the same problems as you.
 - Together, take photos and keep notes about the problem to build a case together for building-wide repairs.
- If your building has a Tenant Association, share your story with them and find out what you can do together to find a solution.
- If you don’t have a tenant or building association, you can start one!
- The first step is to meet with your neighbors to talk about ways to organize and solve shared problems. Then, create a shared list of demands to present to NYCHA management.
 - Share the list with NYCHA management in a letter or at an in-person meeting
- **Knowing these ways to organize with your neighbors, do you feel comfortable trying one or two of them?**
 - **Maybe a show of hands for those who think “Yes,” if there aren’t a lot of folks, you can ask why they feel uncomfortable.**



[Slide 19: “Join a Community Organization”]

- You can also get help from community organizations.
- Many organizations have been fighting alongside NYCHA residents for your right to live in a healthy home.
- These organizations work best when you and your neighbors get involved and fight together for:
 - Better policies.
 - Stronger enforcement of existing housing rules.
- By fighting as a large group across many neighborhoods, you have more power than you would if you fight alone as a single tenant.
- Contact [org name] here: [org email].



[Slide 20: “Get Elected Officials Involved”]

- Your elected officials are there to represent your concerns and interests, and they have a lot of power to change the way things are done.
 1. Call your city council member and ask them to talk to NYCHA for you. You can find out who they are and how to contact them at: <https://www.mygovnyc.org/>.

2. Vote for people who represent public housing interests.



[Slide 21: “Take NYCHA to Court”]

- You can also take legal action against NYCHA, either by yourself or with your neighbors. Here are some steps you can take:
 1. The type of case you file against NYCHA is called a “Housing Part Action”, or HP Action.
 2. You don’t need a lawyer to file an HP Action, but you might want one. A lawyer can go to court so you don’t have to, can communicate with the court more easily-- and can reopen the case if NYCHA doesn’t do the repairs correctly.



[Slide 22: “Other Resources”]

- Some other resources that might be helpful:
 - Sign up for the Community Service Society’s monthly “NYCHA Need to Know” newsletter to stay informed. Email them at info@cssny.org to sign up.
 - Get quarterly reports from the Federal Monitor at: www.nychamonitor.com
 - You can also attend public meetings of community boards 9 through 12. Community boards are made up of appointed volunteers who advocate for the neighborhoods they live in.



[Slide 23: “Join a Community Organization”]

- And of course, your [insert Community Organization name] can help you take action and learn more about everything you heard during the workshop. Email us at: [\[insert your organization’s email address\]](#).
 - If there is one present, share direct contact of a staff member at your Community Organization.



[Slide 24: “Questions/Discussion”]

Depending on how much time you have, it can be helpful to have participants break off into groups to talk about the questions below. After, small groups can share out what they spoke about to the larger group:

- What feels like the most urgent issue out of these three for you all?
- Were you familiar with the health consequences?
- Have you or your family been dealing with health issues because of mold, lead, or pests?
- What has your experience been trying to file a ticket with NYCHA?
- Have you tried other ways of organizing? Do you have any concerns about how to organize or find any of them particularly effective?