



How to help your allergy-stricken clients in real estate

Don't let pesky allergens win

BY MARIA DAMPMAN

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Key Takeaways

- Understanding the most common home allergens will allow you, as a real estate agent, to better serve your clients and help them keep their environment or potential new home healthier.

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Last year, I nearly died after being stung by a bee.

I was unhooking a lead rope from a horse trailer, and I didn't see the tiny wasps nest right above my hand until it was too late, and one of them fell into my jacket sleeve and stung me. I was alone, and I knew I was in deep trouble.

911.

Obviously, I survived. It took two injections of epinephrine, albuterol inhalers and a trained paramedic unit starting an IV to give me God-knows-what other drugs, but they pulled me through.

I am not alone in my anaphylactic reactions. According to a study printed in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (JAMA), anaphylactic allergies occur in about [one in 50 Americans](#), although many believe the rate is probably closer to one in 20.

According to the [Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America \(AAFA\)](#), as many as 30 percent of adults and 40 percent of children have some form of allergy, and allergies are currently the sixth leading cause of chronic illness in America.



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Of course, not all people with allergies have anaphylactic reactions, but consistent repeated exposure to allergens can make the individual sick with a wide variety of symptoms.

Why should we be concerned about this as real estate agents?

[Researchers from the National Institute of Health report](#) that over 90 percent of homes have at least three detectable allergens, and 73 percent of homes have at least one allergen at an elevated level.

“Elevated allergen levels can exacerbate symptoms in people who suffer from asthma and allergies, so it is crucial to understand the factors that contribute,” [said Darryl Zeldin, M.D.](#), senior author and scientific director at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

By understanding home allergens better, [real estate agents](#) are better able to serve their clients and help to keep them and their environment healthier.

Whether serving buyers or sellers, having knowledge of the teeny-tiny irritants that can cause reactions ranging from watery eyes to death can help prevent a number of future problems.

Aiding the allergic seller

To help mitigate germs in their home, the sellers asked to have potential buyers wear a mask and covers over their shoes, both of which would be provided at the house. I remember thinking this was a great idea, and kudos to the agent for addressing this tactfully and professionally.

If your client's family has a significant health issue like this, I see absolutely no reason this is not a reasonable request. After all, we put the footies over our shoes for recently cleaned carpets, why not to help keep a child healthy?

I also think giving the reason the precautions are being requested will make people more likely to abide by them.

Aiding the allergic buyer

When you first meet a new client, you ask them a ton of questions about what they are looking for in their new home. Clients will tell you they may need a fenced yard or a home with a professional kitchen.

Rarely do you get asked for a home that is as allergy-proof as possible, but it does happen.

The AAFA states the [most common indoor/outdoor allergy triggers](#) are: tree, grass and weed pollen, mold spores, dust mites, cockroaches and dander from dogs, cats and rodents.

Most allergic people experience nasal allergies when exposed to these triggers, but repeated exposure to these can also trigger or worsen asthma.

So how can we tell if there is a potential allergen in a home?

If the current owners live with six cats that greet you at the door, and your client is highly allergic to felines, you can reasonably expect your client to start having symptoms almost immediately. Some allergens may need more time to build up, and symptoms will start later and have a more chronic nature.

Regardless of what went on in a home before you buy it, there are ways to mitigate most allergens to make even the most sensitive clients symptom-free.

Mold



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If your clients know they have sensitivity to mold, then doing professional mold testing during the inspection period should be imperative.

A proper mold test will evaluate not only inside the home, but it also compares the air inside the home to what is outside to make sure you don't get false positive results. Not all mold is toxic, but even the least lethal forms can make an allergic homeowner feel chronically ill.

There are over [1,000 species of mold](#) in the U.S., most of which aren't even visible. The biggest red flag for mold is any sign of water where there should not be water; for example, a damp basement.

If your client has a severe mold allergy, you may want to skip making an offer on a home that appears to have regular dampness from water intrusion. Also, a chronically wet exterior will increase mold spore production outside of the home, making outdoor activities a muddy, miserable experience.

Aside from making sure the home isn't chronically damp, The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology states [the best ways to prevent mold from growing](#) in a home are the following:

- Clean up leaks and spills immediately to prevent mold growth
- Use dehumidifiers, exhaust fans or open a window in moisture-prone areas, like bathrooms

- If you have existing visible mold, contact a remediation expert that can identify and clean up existing mold issues

Pet allergies



Unsplash

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), it's not the pet hair that's the problem, but an allergic reaction to an animal's skin cells (dander), saliva or urine. As 62 percent of American households have pets, there's a good chance that your allergic buyer may fall in love with a home that had a former four-legged resident.

Depending on the severity of the allergy, your clients can opt to have the rugs cleaned or even replaced before moving in, and the same with window treatments, which can also hold allergens.

Families that have pet allergies but still want to have a dog or a cat are [recommended by the ACAAI](#) to replace carpets with hardwood, tile or linoleum floors to facilitate cleaning.

Weekly washings in hot water of Fido's bedding also cuts down on dander, as well as regular cleaning with a HEPA filtered vacuum.

Dust mites



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These little buggers (literally) live in everyone's house no matter how much you vacuum. They are too small to see with the naked eye, and they have eight legs, so like spiders, they are considered arthropods.

They live off of the dead skin cells we humans all shed, and they especially love to live in our bedding and mattresses, considering how much time we spend asleep and how many skin cells slough off us there.

Now that you are completely grossed out, the best place to start to de-mite your home is the bedroom. The [AAFA recommends](#) the following to mitigate dust mite allergens:

1. Wash all bedding weekly in hot water to kill mites.
2. Cover mattresses and pillows in zippered mite-proof covers.
3. Remove all fabric items in a bedroom that cannot be washed weekly as these can be a breeding ground for mites. This includes wall to wall carpeting, heavy draperies and

heating units.

Cockroaches



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According to [WebMD](#), 78 percent to 98 percent of urban homes have roaches, and up to 60 percent of city-dwelling asthmatics are allergic to the waste products, bodies and saliva of these cringe-inducing critters. Aside from asthmatic and nasal symptoms, cockroach allergies can also cause chronic sinus infections and skin rashes.

To prevent buying a “roach motel,” your home inspectors should uncover if there are currently cockroaches residing in the house, and if there are, it’s best to bring in a professional to take care of the problem before you move in.

Even if there was a past issue, keeping roaches and other insects out of your home is fairly easy if you remain vigilant and practice good sanitation. Roaches like homes that are easy to access, warm and have an ample supply of food and water.

Keeping your home’s exterior clean by keeping landscaping neatly trimmed and away from walls and caulking any cracks or openings in the siding is a great start to your [preventative](#)

your plumbing system. Regularly sweep your floors and clean countertops to keep your home tidy and roach free.

Bee stings



Photo by Eric Ward on Unsplash

Insect sting allergies affect 5 percent of the population and cause 90 to 100 Americans to die each year.

Most bee-sting allergic people are amazingly talented at spotting hidden nests in eaves and low-hanging tree branches, as avoidance of nests is usually the best way to avoid a sting.

The movement of the swarm in and out of the hive is usually what draws the eye to the nest, and a truly allergic person spends most of his or her warm-weather outdoor time watching for airborne insect movement.

What is much more dangerous than lofty nests are the ones created by ground wasps and nests built in wood piles and stone walls. These locations are harder to see as you usually

Even if you and your clients are not allergic, if you encounter a bee nest on a property, please call the listing agent and let him or her know. Although you and your client may be fine, the next people coming for a showing may not be so lucky.

Every time I have ever called an agent to let him or her know, I have always received a courteous response. After all, getting stung at a showing is not a great way to get a home sold.

Preparing for a potential allergic buyer emergency

If your buyer has told you he or she has a severe allergy to something, ask him or her to please come prepared with whatever the doctor has prescribed in case of an emergency.

Always make sure you have a fully charged phone to call for help, if needed. Should emergency help be needed, call the ambulance first and tell the operator that you are dealing with someone with anaphylaxis and/or respiratory distress and to send an advanced life support or paramedic unit.

Paramedics differ from regular ambulance transport, as they can administer certain medications, place an IV and intubate or create a surgical airway, if needed.

As you wait for the ambulance, your job is to keep the affected person calm, as a rush of fear-induced adrenaline will only make symptoms worse. If your client has an EpiPen or an albuterol inhaler, make sure he or she uses it if he or she needs it.

Have the person sit or lie down as he or she may lose consciousness. Ask your client where his or her purse or wallet is, as the emergency crew will need a medical card and ID for the hospital. Also, ask who you should call to notify that you are headed to the hospital.

As a Realtor with a history of anaphylaxis, I am responsible for not only taking care of my clients but also myself. I make my clients aware of my bee sting allergy and assure them that should I get stung, I know what to do.

If I get stung during a showing I would need them to go to my truck and grab my purse which contains my EpiPens, my insurance card and ID. I know how to inject myself with my epinephrine and carry an emergency albuterol inhaler.

I have an ICE (in case of emergency) contact programmed into my phone that my client can call if I lose consciousness. I also wear a medical alert bracelet during “bee season” that states my name and allergies.

Most importantly, I do not put myself into positions where I can get stung.

My clients understand I will not go into a structure if I see a nest or swarm that could be easily disturbed. As my clients don't want to get stung any more than I do, they have all

have the skills necessary to create a well-thought out plan. Being prepared for an emergency is never a waste of time, especially if it can save a life.

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Tim Mock · Real Estate Agent/Broker at Tim Mock, Realtor, Raleigh NC, Coldwell Banker Howard Perry and Walston

This is a very informative and timely article. Just this evening a new buyer client of mine told me that his wife had a double lung transplant. Obviously, they need a property that is almost sterile and free from mold and other allergens. I have another buyer who suffers from asthma. When we encountered a listing with a subfloor that appeared ready to collapse

listings to our buyers

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