

Choosing a Healthy Home & Community



The homes and communities we choose have a major impact on our health and the health of our families. Not surprisingly, people living in a well-maintained home in a walkable neighborhood with places to buy nutritious food are healthier.

Consider the biggest health concerns for you or your family.

- **Do you have small children?** Avoid Injuries/Poisoning or Respiratory Health might be your priorities.
- **Are you worried about weight and exercise?** Focus on Active Living and Nutrition to build healthy weight and exercise habits into your daily life.
- **Do you struggle to manage asthma and allergies?** Start with Respiratory Health.
- **Want to reduce stress or improve your ability to focus and concentrate?** Protect your Mental Health.

Circle the top two issues most important to you or your family.

Active Living Avoid Injuries/Poisoning Respiratory Health Nutrition Mental Health

HEALTH PRIORITIES

 **Mental Health** Contact with nature decreases childhood and adult stress, and may mitigate symptoms of ADD.¹ A vital urban forest improves the mental health of all residents, so look out the windows for trees and parks.

 **Respiratory Health** Housing and home pollutants increase the likelihood of asthma and allergies.² Two ways to minimize the risk of triggering asthma and allergies in the home are:
1) Reducing moisture from leaks and daily activities like cooking and showering, and
2) Reducing carpeted flooring that often harbors dust mites and pest debris.³ Children living less than one short city block from a highway or arterial road have increased asthma and wheezing,⁴ but urban locations a block away do not pose significant risk.

 **Active Living** Adults should get two hours and 30 minutes of physical activity per week and children should get an hour a day.⁵ An easy way to meet this goal is to walk or bicycle to destinations every day, and people living in neighborhoods with sidewalks, transit, and amenities are more physically active.

 **Avoid Injuries/Poisoning** Home related injuries result in nearly 20,000 deaths and 21 million medical visits on average each year, most commonly from falls and poisoning.⁶ Exposure to other toxins such as lead, second hand-smoke, and radon can cause difficulties with learning or cancer. Choose homes that are well-maintained and tested for toxins.

 **Nutrition** Affordable access to the full range of foods that make up a healthy diet is not equally available in all locations, and places without access are often called “food deserts.” “Many scientific studies have suggested that food deserts may negatively affect health outcomes,” so savvy home shoppers should look near full service grocery options.⁷

How to Best Use this Checklist

This checklist is a guideline. Some items are identified as Critical [★ ★ ★], and a “No” on one of these questions may be reason to consider rejecting that home. Other items are identified as Important [★ ★] or a Best Practice [★]. To find a home or apartment that is the healthiest option for you and your family, use this checklist to compare up to three homes. Carry it with you as you visit homes you are considering. If the answer to a question is unclear, ask during your tour of the home.

A Certified Home

Trustworthy certification programs help ensure the quality of the home by using an outside contractor to verify performance, and most address critical health issues.

Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Health Priority	Importance	Question
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Is the home certified under a program that uses third-party verification (i.e. Green Communities, LEED, Breathe Easy, Home Performance with Energy Star, Energy Star Indoor Air Package, Passive House, or other?)*

* These programs include requirements for moisture management, ventilation, toxin limits, air sealing, and aspects of integrated pest management that match many of the checklist's goals.

Choosing a Neighborhood

Neighborhoods affect our mental health, how much physical activity is part of our daily lives, and the healthiness of our diets. People living in neighborhoods with sidewalks, transit, and useful amenities are more likely to meet physical activity guidelines and 35% less likely to be obese.⁶ Eating a healthy diet is easier with close access to full service grocery stores and restaurant options other than fast food.

Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Health Priority	Importance	Question
				★★	Look for a home with a high walkscore (www.walkscore.com). What is the walkscore?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★★	Is there a transit stop within a five minute walk (¼ mile)? Do the routes that stop there go to useful places?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Walk around the neighborhood for 15 minutes. Overall, does it feel safe, welcoming, and pleasant? Do you see people walking or children playing? Are there trees shading sidewalks and walking paths? Is it easy to cross streets? Is it well enough lit to walk after dark?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Is there space to bicycle safely? Can you ride to a bike path? Do the streets feel safe for bicycling? Do bike paths and safe cycling streets go to useful places? Do local destinations have bike parking?
				★	How many useful destinations or amenities are easy to walk to? Bank? Coffee shop? Pharmacy? Post office? Park? School or child care center? Library? Place of worship?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★★	Can you walk to a grocery store? Is there a neighborhood farmers market or a community garden? Are nearby restaurants sit-down places that serve "slow" food?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★★	Is the home more than 220 yards from a major street or highway?*
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★★	Does the home provide views of nature from both inside and outside spaces? Is there nearby nature? Is it easy to walk or bike to neighborhood parks, trails, and recreational facilities?

* There is a trade-off between the air pollution very close to major roads and the benefits of living very close to amenities and transit. The pollution can trigger or make respiratory disease in children and adults worse, while being close to amenities and transit tends to reduce obesity and increase physical activity. One short city block is a reasonable buffer for a big city street, but it is recommended to live two blocks away from highways.⁴

Assessing the Exterior and the Yard

The most common home health problem is injuries, but lead paint and dust are commonly found in older communities. A well-maintained home is less likely to have leaks in the roof or foundation, or the flaking paint or exposed dirt where lead dust is most likely to lurk. Does the fence look sturdy enough for climbing, the yard safe for playing tag? Look around to identify potential accidents and protect your family's health when choosing a home.

Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Health Priority	Importance	Question
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Does the building look clean and well-maintained?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Is the outside of the building free from water damage (water stains), including the siding, fascia/soffits, and foundation? Do downspouts discharge at least four feet from the building foundation? Are the gutters maintained and clear of debris?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	If there is a porch, deck, patio, or balcony, and are the railings secure? Are all of the spindles in place, in good condition, and close enough that children cannot fit between them? Is the railing high enough to protect people from falling and prevent small children from climbing over?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Is the yard free of hazards that could cause injuries, such as missing or broken railings or steps, broken or damaged fences or gates, damaged or unsafe playground equipment, or seriously cracked pavement or stairs?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Is there an outdoor place like a yard or playground where your child can play and you can supervise from inside? (Applies only if you have children.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	If the home was built before 1978, is it free of peeling, cracked, or flaking paint? Has the home passed a Certified Lead Clearance Test?*
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	In neighborhoods built out prior to 1980, is the yard free of bare soil? If there is a septic tank, was it pumped in the last three years? (Applies only to home purchases.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Are the walls and foundation free of small holes or cracks where pests or water could get through?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Do you see old log piles or piles of trash or debris that would make a good home for rodents outside either this home or the neighboring home?

*A Clearance Test is where a third party person, usually a lead inspector or lead assessor, comes in and wipes an area with a moist wipe. That wipe is sent to an EPA approved laboratory to verify the amount (if any) of lead dust. <http://rrpcompliance.com/news/renovation-repair-and-painting-rule-changes-in-july>, retrieved 1-20-2011.

Assessing Inside the Home/Indoor Air

Injuries are also a problem inside homes. Poor indoor air quality from moisture and pollutants we introduce through activities like cooking can be managed with ventilation. Asthma and allergy triggers can be reduced in an easy-to-clean home with hard surface floors. Some poisons, like radon and carbon monoxide, are invisible and unscented. However, testing and alarms are effective solutions.

Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Health Priority	Importance	Question
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Does the building look clean and well-maintained? Does everything work (elevators, doors, outlets, etc.)? Do the windows open and close?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Is the home free from hazards that could cause injuries, such as tripping hazards, sharp edges that could produce cuts, and missing or broken stairs or railings?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★ ★	Are there functioning smoke detectors? Is there a carbon monoxide (CO) alarm within ten feet of all bedrooms on all floors?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Is there a smoke-free policy? (Applies only to rented homes.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★ ★	If there is a working wood-burning fireplace, is there a functioning fresh air inlet to ensure the fire drafts out the chimney? Is the damper in good shape?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Is the building free of signs of past water leaks? Look for discoloration or flaking on ceilings below the roof, bathrooms, and kitchens.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★ ★	Is the building free of all signs of mold or any musty odors? If you smell air fresheners, have they been used to cover another smell?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Are the windows free of condensation and water stains or other signs of moisture?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Is the home free of that “new house,” “new carpet,” or general “new” smell?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Does the home have all or mostly solid surface floors easy to keep free of dust, like wood, laminate, cork, or tile?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	If there is carpet, is it Green Label certified or Green Label Plus certified?*
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Is the garage separate from the house?

*The Carpet and Rug Institute certifies carpets and carpet adhesives that emit very low VOCs, or Volatile Organic Compounds. VOCs reduce indoor air quality.

Basement, Laundry Room, and Mechanical Room

Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Health Priority	Importance	Question
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Does the laundry duct exhaust to the outdoors? Is it made of rigid smooth metal?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★ ★	Are the boiler/furnace and water heater either power vented or combustion sealed? If not, is there a fresh air inlet & has a test been performed to show that fixtures do not “backdraft” carbon monoxide when burning or when ventilation fans are on?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	For homes with forced air heating and cooling, does the building have a recently changed air filter?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★ ★	Has the lowest level of the building been tested for radon? Were the results less than 4pC/l?*
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Does the basement or garden level have hard-surface flooring?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Are the walls free of any signs of water leaks, mold, or mildew? Look for discoloration or flaking. Does the air smell neutral?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Is the house free of exposed fiberglass insulation? (Also check usable attics.)

* For EPA information on radon, visit <http://www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/citguide.html>

Kitchen

Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Health Priority	Importance	Question
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★ ★	If there is a well, has it been tested in the last year? Do the results show it is safe?*
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Do the entry and kitchen have solid surface, non-carpet flooring?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Are all the outlets within six feet of a sink GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) outlets (the kind with a “Test” and “Reset” button)?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Is the kitchen free of any signs of water leaks, mold, or mildew?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★ ★	Is there an exhaust fan in the kitchen? Does it vent to the outside & pass the “toilet paper” test?***

* For EPA information on well testing, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/private/wells/testing.html>, retrieved 3-18-2011.

** Hold one piece of 2-ply toilet paper up to the fan while it’s turned on. If it holds up one piece, it is drawing 25 cubic feet of air per minute (cfm). Typically, you want a kitchen fan to draw at least 100 cfm (hold up a pile of four squares of paper).

Bathroom(s)

Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Health Priority	Importance	Question
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	If you are elderly or will host older friends and family, are grab bars installed in the shower and by the toilet?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★★	Do the entry and bathroom have solid surface, non-carpet flooring?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★★	Are all the outlets within six feet of a sink GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) outlets (the kind with a “Test” and “Reset” button)?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★★	Are there exhaust fans in the bathroom? Does the fan vent to the outside & pass the “toilet paper” test?*
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Is the fan quiet enough that you’ll use it? Does it have a timer, humidistat, or motion sensor so people don’t have to “remember” to use it?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★★	Is there a one-piece shower enclosure? If there is tile, is the grout free of any signs of mold or mildew (discoloration)?

* Hold one piece of 2-ply toilet paper up to the fan while it’s turned on. If it holds up one piece, it is drawing 25 cubic feet of air per minute (cfm). Typically, you want a bathroom fan to draw at least 50 cfm (hold up a pile of two squares of paper).

Bedrooms

Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Health Priority	Importance	Question
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★★★	Are there two exits (door plus window or other) from every bedroom, including egress windows from basement or garden level bedrooms?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		★	Is there at least one bedroom free of carpet?

Questions and comments?

Please send comments or questions regarding this document to janne@mngreencommunities.org.

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