Key tips for a warmer, drier home
Key tips for a warmer, drier home

This toolkit was created with a range of health and social service providers and Māori, Tongan and Samoan communities.

These tips will help you to shape your conversations with families, empowering them to keep their homes warmer and drier and prevent germs from spreading.

You can choose which tips to share, depending on the families you work with, and the relationships you have with them. If you feel any of the tips are inappropriate for the family, please feel free to leave them out of the conversation. The information on the back of each tip is to guide your discussions with families and can be adjusted to suit different situations.

If families choose to follow even just a couple of these key tips, they may be able to make their home significantly warmer, drier and more comfortable to live in. They may also reduce the likelihood of a family member contracting rheumatic fever or other respiratory illnesses.

Why?

In a warm, dry home the family may have more space to spread out around the home, rather than having to crowd in the same room. Having more warm rooms and more sleeping spaces available means germs such as strep throat, which can lead to rheumatic fever, are less likely to spread.
Tēnā koutou, Talofa, Mālō e lelei

Keeping your family healthy this winter means keeping your home warm and dry.

Three wonderful families generously welcomed us into their homes to share some of the most important things they do to achieve that.

It’s all part of stopping sore throats hurting hearts.

We asked each of the families this question

“What does family mean to you?”

Margaret and Haki (4 children)

“My Aiga means my heart”

Sili and Langi (7 children)

“What does family mean to you?”

Noelini and Paul (4 children)

“Fāmili to me is everything”

STOP Sore Throats Hurting Hearts
Preventing Rheumatic Fever
Tēnā koutou, Talofa, Mālō e lelei

Meet the families that helped us to create this resource to share with you.

Margaret and Haki (4 children)  Sili and Langi (7 children)  Noelini and Paul (4 children)
Why is it important to keep your home warm and dry?

A warmer, drier home makes it harder for germs such as strep throat to spread. If left untreated, strep throat can lead to a serious disease called rheumatic fever.

If you choose to follow even just a couple of tips, your home could be cheaper to heat and more comfortable to live in, and you will be helping to protect your family from health problems.

What is rheumatic fever?
Rheumatic fever is a serious but preventable disease that can damage the heart, and it starts with a type of sore throat called a strep throat.

Who can get rheumatic fever?
In New Zealand, Māori and Pacific children and young adults aged 4 to 19 years are more likely to get rheumatic fever – especially if they have other whānau who have had it. Overcrowded homes put people at higher risk.

Did you know?
If your home is dry it makes your home easier to heat and reduces the cost of heating.
What is rheumatic fever?
- A serious disease that can damage the heart, and it starts with a type of sore throat called a strep throat.
- Most sore throats aren’t strep throat and will heal naturally, but a strep throat needs to be treated with a full course of antibiotics to stop it turning into rheumatic fever.
- In a small number of people, an untreated strep throat leads to rheumatic fever 1 to 5 weeks later. This can cause the heart, joints, brain and skin to become inflamed and swollen.
- The more untreated strep throats someone has, the higher their risk of getting rheumatic fever.
- In New Zealand, Māori and Pacific children and young adults aged 4 to 19 years are more likely to get rheumatic fever – especially if they have other whānau who have had it. Overcrowded homes put people at higher risk.
- Rheumatic fever can lead to rheumatic heart disease. This is where there is scarring of the heart valves. This stops valves from working properly.
- Children who have had rheumatic fever will need to get monthly injections for at least 10 years, and may need heart valve replacement surgery.
- For a child, it may also mean they aren’t able to play sport or do other things that put a strain on their heart.

Why is it important to keep your home warm and dry?

What is rheumatic fever?
Keeping your home warm

TIP: Open your curtains during the day and close them at night.

Your windows let heat in during the day. Closing curtains before sunset keeps the heat in, and the cold out, at night.
Keeping your home warm

TIP: Open your curtains during the day and close them at night.

Discuss why:

- Sunlight warms your home during the day, but the night air can make your home colder
- Curtains will keep the heat in and the cold out at night
- There might be a curtain bank in your area where you may be able to get curtains for free
- If you choose to use alternative window coverings (for example, sheets or lava lava) try to get a snug fit around the window frame

Because they are cotton, they won't be as effective as lined curtains that reach the floor at blocking the cold evening air. They will still need to be opened during the day.

Add your local curtain bank details here:
Keeping your home warm

TIP:
Stop cold air getting into your home by stopping draughts around doors, windows and fireplaces.

Stopping cold air coming in makes it easier to heat your home and helps reduce the cost of heating.
**TIP: Stop cold air getting into your home by stopping draughts around doors, windows and fireplaces.**

**Discuss why:**

- **Stopping draughts can make your home warmer, by preventing cold air entering your home.**

- **To block draughts around doors:**
  - there might be a curtain bank in your area where you can get a draught stopper cheaply
  - sew your own draught stopper
  - use an old dry towel or something similar like old blankets or curtains.

- **To block draughts around windows:**
  - use weather stripping – you can buy it from a hardware store
  - make sure hinges, catches and latches are tight.

- **To block draughts from a fireplace that isn’t being used:**
  - use a rubbish bag filled with shredded newspaper to plug the flue; if you choose this option, make it very obvious that the rubbish bag is to stop draughts and is not fuel for the fire!

Add your local curtain bank details here:
Keeping your home warm

TIP: Check you have the best heating option for your home.

The right heat source for your home can make your home easier to heat and reduce the cost of heating.

Different heating options create different levels of condensation – choose the option that will create the least amount in your home.
Keeping your home warm

TIP: Check you have the best heating option for your home.

Discuss why:

- There are many heating options, and some are safer and cheaper to run than others.
- Recommended heating options are:
  - Electric heater with a thermostat
  - Gas heater with chimney (flue)
  - Heat pump
  - Modern pellet or wood burner.

- If you use an electric heater with a thermostat and have kids or elderly people in the house:
  - set the thermostat at around 20 degrees during the day
  - set the thermostat at around 16 degrees in bedrooms at night.

- A portable gas heater is not recommended because:
  - it doesn’t have a chimney (flue) to carry the harmful gases outside or away from your home
  - it releases lots of moisture into the air. This makes your home damp and causes condensation
  - it can be a fire risk. Anything too close can catch fire quickly
  - if you do use one, keep at least one window open. Never use it in bedrooms.

If you’re worried about your power bill, talk to your power company – they might have solutions to help, such as a pay-as-you-go or smooth pay option.
Keeping your home warm

TIP:
Find out if your home is insulated. If it isn’t, you may qualify to have insulation installed for free.

Insulation is one of the best ways to keep your home warm.
Keeping your home warm

TIP: Find out if your home is insulated. If it isn’t, you may qualify to have insulation installed for free

Discuss how:

- You might qualify to have ceiling and underfloor insulation installed for free if:
  - your home (or the home that you rent) was built before 2000
  - and you have a Community Services Card
  - and you have children aged under 17 years and/or people aged over 65 years living in the home
  - or you have health issues related to cold, damp housing.
- Free call EECA ENERGYWISE on 0800 358 676 or visit energywise.govt.nz/your-home/insulation for more information.
- Some local councils have programmes that could help you get free or subsidised insulation. Contact your local council to find out what is on offer in your area.
- If you have a Community Services Card and find you need to move, you may still be eligible to get help with insulation at your new place.
- The priority for insulating your home should be:
  1. Ceiling
  2. Underfloor.

Add your local insulation scheme contact details here:
Keeping your home warm and dry

TIP:
Open your windows (ventilate) for at least a few minutes each day.

Fresh air helps to keep your home dry, makes it easier to heat your home, and helps reduce the cost of heating.
Keeping your home warm and dry

TIP: Open your windows (ventilate) for at least a few minutes each day.

Discuss how:

To get fresh air into your home:

• Open windows for at least a few minutes each day, in each room, even in winter.
Keeping your home dry

TIP:
Open windows (ventilate) in the kitchen when you cook, and in the bathroom when you shower or take a bath, to let steam out.

Doing this helps to keep your home dry, which makes your home easier to heat and reduces the cost of heating.
Keeping your home dry

TIP: Open windows (ventilate) in the kitchen when you cook, and in the bathroom when you shower or take a bath, to let steam out.

Discuss how:

◆ To let steam out:
  • open windows in the kitchen when you cook
  • open windows in the bathroom when you shower or take a bath.

◆ Extractor fans also let steam out, so if you have one in your kitchen or bathroom, this is a good time to use it.
Keeping your home dry

**TIP:**

Wipe off any water that has collected (condensation) on walls and on the inside of windows.

Doing this helps to keep your home dry, which makes your home easier to heat and reduces the cost of heating.
Keeping your home dry

TIP: Wipe off any water that has collected (condensation) on walls and on the inside of windows.

Discuss why:

- Condensation builds up very easily on the inside of a home (especially if it is very cold outside). So it’s really important to ventilate to stop condensation.
- Condensation makes your rooms feel damp – dampness can cause mould to grow.
- Wiping off condensation removes water that has built up over time in your home.
- Hang the wet cloth used to wipe up the condensation outside to dry.
Keeping your home dry

TIP:

Dry your washing outside or in the garage or carport.

It keeps the dampness from your washing (which can build up condensation) outside of your home.
Keeping your home dry

TIP: Dry your washing outside or in the garage or carport.

Discuss why:

✦ As washing dries, the water in it goes back into the air. If you dry clothes inside your home then the air gets damp

✦ Drying washing outside means you will avoid condensation building up inside your home

✦ If you do dry your washing inside the garage, you still need to ventilate (otherwise your garage can get damp and mouldy)

✦ Doing this helps to keep your home dry, which makes your home easier to heat and reduces the cost of heating.
Removing mould from your home

**TIP:**
Use bleach or white vinegar to remove mould from ceilings and walls.

Mould grows in damp and wet places and it can affect your family’s health.
Removing mould from your home

TIP: Use bleach or white vinegar to remove mould from ceilings and walls.

Discuss how:

➤ Once a week, wash mould off walls and ceilings using either a bleach solution or white vinegar. Never mix bleach and vinegar.

➤ If using bleach:
   1. Add 2 teaspoons of bleach to 1 litre of water
   2. Put the solution into a clean spray bottle and spray directly on to the mould or use a sponge
   3. If the mould is in a tricky corner, wipe the solution on with a clean cloth or an old toothbrush
   4. Wait for at least 15 minutes
   5. Wipe off the solution with a sponge or cloth and warm soapy water
   6. Rinse the sponge to help stop the mould from spreading
   7. Dry the sponge or cloth outside.

➤ If using white vinegar:
   • Don’t add any water
   • Follow steps 2 to 7 above.

If mould comes back after you’ve cleaned it off, try to make sure the area is getting good ventilation by opening windows.
Preventing germs from spreading

TIP:
Create as much space as possible between the heads of sleeping children.

Kids cough and sneeze when they are asleep, and this is how germs such as strep throat can spread between sleeping children.
Preventing germs from spreading

TIP: Create as much space as possible between the heads of sleeping children.

Discuss why:

⚠️ The further apart that kids’ heads are while sleeping, the harder it is for germs such as strep throat to spread

⚠️ Bunk beds are a good way to keep kids’ heads apart. For safety, only children over 9 years old should be in the top bunk.
Preventing germs from spreading

TIP:
Top and tailing – also sometimes called top and toeing – is a good option for creating space between the heads of sleeping children, if your children share a bed or mattress.

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Preventing germs from spreading

TIP: Top and tailing – also sometimes called top and toeing – is a good option for creating space between the heads of sleeping children, if your children share a bed or mattress.

Discuss why:

• The further apart that kids’ heads are while sleeping, the harder it is for germs such as strep throat to spread.

There may be cultural or other reasons why this tip may not be appropriate to discuss with some families. It’s your choice whether to share this tip or not, depending on the circumstances of the families you work with, and the relationships you have with them.
If your child gets a sore throat

• Don’t ignore it.
• Take them to a free Sore Throat Clinic or see a doctor or nurse.
• Call Healthline on 0800 611 116 to find out more, or if you are worried about your child.
• If your child is given antibiotics, make sure they take them for the full 10 days – even if they feel better, to stop the sore throat turning into rheumatic fever.
If your child gets a sore throat

• Even you follow all of the tips I’ve shown you, sometimes kids still get sore throats.

• If your child has a sore throat, take them to a doctor or nurse straight away to get it checked.

• There might be a free sore throat clinic near you. Call Healthline free on 0800 611 116 or visit www.health.govt.nz/sorethroatclinics to find the closest one.

• You can also ring Healthline on 0800 611 116 if you’re worried about your child. It’s free and nurses are there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to offer advice.

• Your child will be given antibiotics if they have strep throat. If your child is given antibiotics, make sure they take them for the full 10 days – even if they feel better, to prevent the sore throat turning into rheumatic fever.

• If your child is diagnosed with strep throat, then anyone else living in your home aged between 3 and 35 years who also has a sore throat can get it checked and treated for free at a sore throat clinic.

• Treating everyone living in your home will help prevent strep throat spreading in your household. Strep throat can be caught again and must be treated each time.
Tēnā koe, Fa’afetai, Mālō

Thank you to all the wonderful organisations, families and individuals for their support and help in developing this resource.

• Alliance Health Plus Trust
• Auckland District Health Board
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• Family Start
• Health Star Pacific Trust
• Kakano Early Childhood Centre
• Kidz First Children’s Hospital and Community Services
• Kokiri Marae Health & Social Services
• Mana Kidz
• Manaia Health Primary Health Organisation
• Maraeroa Marae Health Clinic Inc
• National Hauora Coalition
• Ngāti Porou Hauora
• Northland District Health Board
• Ora Toa Health Services
• Pacific Health Service Porirua
• Pacific Health Service Hutt Valley
• Penina Health Trust
• Ringa Atawhai Trust
• South Seas Healthcare Trust
• The Fono Health and Social Services
• Tu Kotahi Māori Asthma Trust
• Turanga Health
• Turuki Health Care
• Weymouth Early Discoveries Centre

If you have any feedback or ideas on how we can improve this resource, or to request copies, please contact info@moh.govt.nz
For more information about rheumatic fever and the Rheumatic Fever Prevention Programme, please visit rheumaticfever.health.govt.nz
Summary of key tips

Following these tips will keep your home warmer, drier and healthier.

7. Open your curtains during the day and close them at night.

9. Stop cold air getting into your home by stopping draughts around doors, windows and fireplaces.

11. Check you have the best heating option for your home.

13. Find out if your home is insulated. If it isn’t, you may qualify to have insulation installed for free.

15. Open your windows (ventilate) for at least a few minutes each day.

17. Open windows (ventilate) in the kitchen when you cook, and in the bathroom when you shower or take a bath, to let steam out.

19. Wipe off any water that has collected (condensation) on walls and on the inside of windows.

21. Dry your washing outside or in the garage or carport.

23. Use bleach or white vinegar to remove mould from ceilings and walls.

25. Create as much space as possible between the heads of sleeping children.

27. Top and tailing – also sometimes called top and toeing – is a good option for creating space between the heads of sleeping children, if your children share a bed or mattress.