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## Gas heaters linked to asthma in children

Following the release of today's findings by the Woolcock Institute for Medical Research into links between fume emitting heaters and risk of asthma in children, NSW Health has renewed its warning about the potential health effects associated with the use of unflued gas heaters. Research on children exposed to unflued gas heating consistently demonstrates increased rates of coughs, colds and asthma symptoms. The Institute's study found exposure to fume emitting heaters during the first year of life is associated with an increased risk of asthma later in childhood. Involving over 500 children aged between 8 and 11 years from Belmont NSW, the results of the study are tabled in the industry publication Thorax. Dr Michael Staff, Director of the Environmental Health Branch for NSW Health advises that people who use unflued gas heating should be aware of the potential health effects of using this source of heating and consider changing to a heater that doesn't emit fumes into the house such as flued gas or electric. "Gas heaters produce heat through burning gas fuel and when this fuel is burnt, air pollutants such as carbon monoxide and oxides of nitrogen are produced," Dr Staff said. "A flued gas heater vents these air pollutants outside the home through the flue, however an unflued gas heater releases them directly into the home. "In another recent Australian study of 120 homes with unflued gas heaters tested in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, two-thirds had nitrogen dioxide levels above the World Health Organisation guideline, and several had carbon monoxide levels above the guideline. The use of unflued gas heaters in NSW is relatively common. The NSW Health 2002 Adult Health Survey, showed that 19.4 per cent of people reported they use a gas heater without a flue to heat their home, seven per cent use a gas heater with a flue, and 3.2 per cent use an open fireplace. Remaining respondents (49.2 per cent) used electric heaters. NSW Health advises that people most susceptible to the effects of air pollutants are those with heart

disease or asthma, children, unborn babies and the elderly. For people who wish to continue to use an unflued gas heater the following tips can help to reduce exposure to air pollutants:

- § Be sure to properly ventilate your room. Check that all air vents are not blocked. If you don't have air vents, make sure you keep a door or window open to allow a movement of air in and out of the room.
- § Ensure that an unflued gas heater is the correct size for the area of your home you wish to heat as the wrong size can produce more air pollutants. Ask the retailer to determine the type and size of heater that is best for your home.
- § If choosing an unflued gas heater, ensure it has an electronic ignition. Some heaters also have safety systems that can shut the heater off when there is not enough fresh air in the room.
- § Have your heater installed by a qualified tradesperson, as they will know to follow any building code requirements.
- § Always follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to operate your heater and read and follow any warning labels.
- § Never use an unflued gas heater overnight in the room where you sleep.
- § Ensure your heater undergoes regular inspections and maintenance checks. A gas heater in poor working order can emit high levels of pollutants into your home.

[http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2004/20040826\\_00.html](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2004/20040826_00.html)