

## Little Things That Aggravate Asthma

Scientists may be no closer to explaining why the incidence of asthma has been escalating in the United States, but a new study confirms that a number of common indoor materials may be making the situation worse.

The Institute of Medicine, part of the National Academy of Sciences, has issued a report agreeing with those who believe that factors like dust mites, secondhand smoke and allergens shed by pets can play a role in making asthma worse for those who are predisposed to the disease. The institute also recommended ways to limit the irritants. More than 17 million Americans suffer from some form of long-term respiratory disease, and since 1980, the prevalence of asthma has increased by about 75 percent. In their report, scientists working for the medical institute reviewed the literature about asthma to try to determine what substances, if any, might cause or worsen it. The strongest consensus involved dust mites, the tiny creatures existing in virtually every household. "We concluded that, for dust mites, the evidence showed that they were a cause of the disease," said Dr. Thomas A. E. Platts-Mills, the allergy division chief at the University of Virginia Health Sciences Center and a member of the institute committee that prepared the report. "But for the other allergens, the evidence as not as clear."