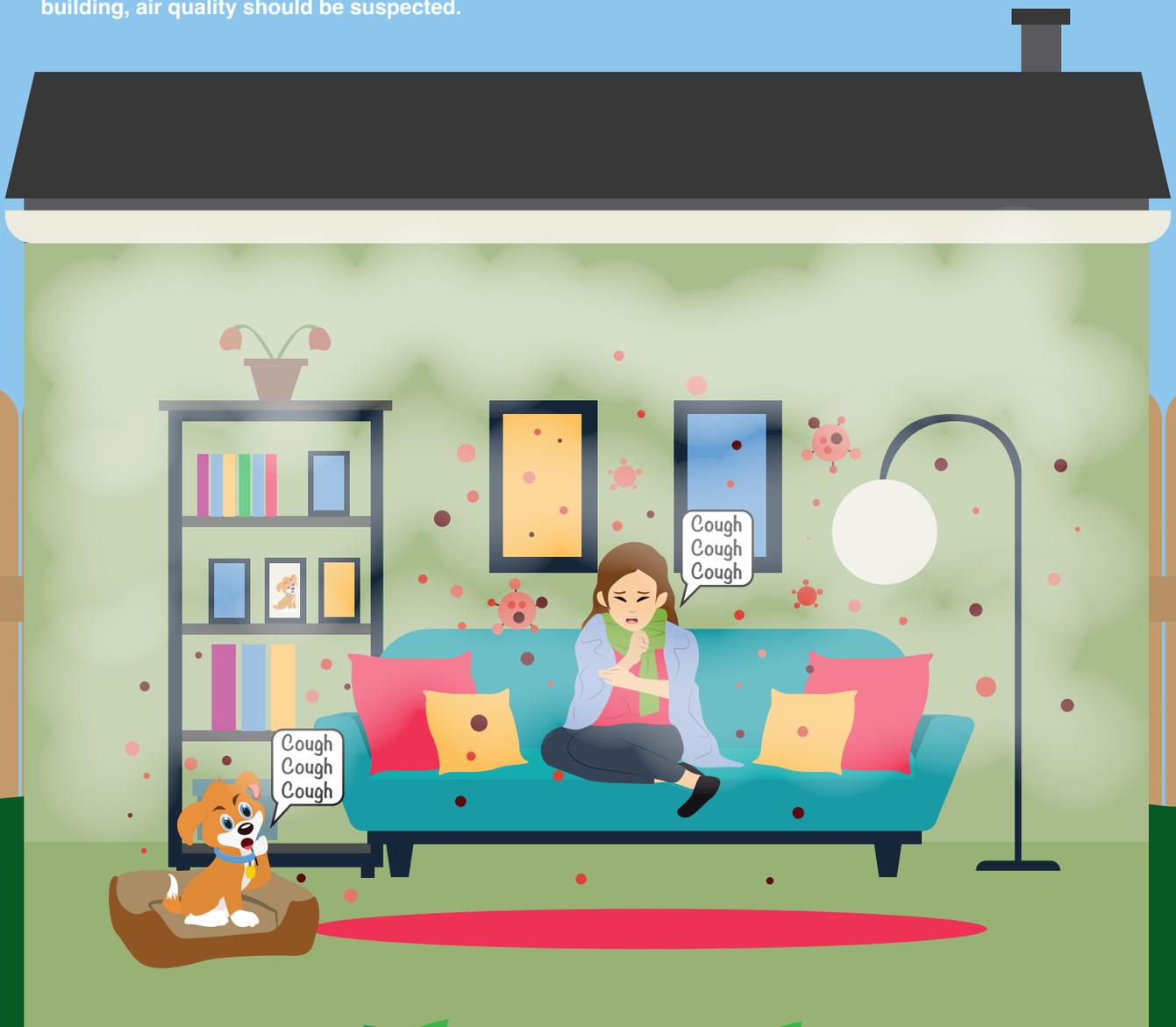
SYSTEMS24-7

WHEN SHOULD I START SUSPECTING THAT INDOOR AIR QUALITY (IAQ) MAY BE A PROBLEM?

When there is a problem with IAQ, people may experience various health conditions. Since many of the symptoms are very similar to what we feel like when coming down with a cold or the flu (influenza), it is often difficult to say for sure if indoor air is the cause of the symptoms.

However, it would be prudent to investigate IAQ if people develop these symptoms within a few hours of starting the workday and feel better after leaving the building, or after a weekend or vacation. In addition, if many people report similar symptoms, or if all of the people reporting symptoms work in the same area of a building, air quality should be suspected.



How do I investigate possible IAQ problems?

Typically people will report that they are experiencing symptoms believed to be caused by IAQ. Unfortunately finding the source or cause can often be difficult. The steps taken may vary from situation to situation but will include:

- **Investigate the ventilation system to make sure it is operating properly (e.g., the right mix of fresh air, proper distribution, filtration systems are working, etc.).**
- **Look for possible causes (e.g., source of a chemical, renovations, mould, etc.).**
- **Rule out common causes of the symptoms such as noise, thermal comfort, humidity, ergonomics, lighting, etc.**
- **Conduct a survey to help pin-point work sources and causes.**
- **Consider help and/or air testing by a qualified professional.**

Who should investigate?

Many people may play a role in helping to resolve an IAQ problem including the building owner, employer, property manager, and occupants. Who conducts your investigation will depend on your workplace, but in general, you should have one person who is the leader, and perhaps a small team, including a representative from the work site health and safety committee, or the union, if appropriate. The expertise of many other people such as health and safety or building maintenance personnel, and the experience of everyone in the workplace will all be important in finding the root cause of your IAQ problem.

Information Source: CCOHS https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/chemicals/iaq_intro.html