

## Cat in the Attic

**Exploring uninhabited areas of a house can lead to sickness or injury.**

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Q. My cats like to explore my basement. I recently realized that one cat is going up into the ceiling area, which is lined with pink insulation. I am worried that it isn't good for her. I have found wafts of insulation on the floor, so I know she is digging into it.

Do you recommend I keep her away from that area? Is it unhealthy for her to be exposed to the insulation?

A. Unfortunately, there is not a great deal of information on the associated risks for cats exposed to insulation. Most of the pet-based epidemiologic health reports are largely limited to asbestos, pesticide and environmental tobacco smoke exposure. Since no studies have been performed, this does not mean that such chemical-based materials are safe.

Certainly, cats can display respiratory signs (such as asthma or irritant-related disease) and gastrointestinal signs (vomiting and diarrhea) if they are ingesting the insulation. Some cats manifest dermatological (skin) sensitivity to insulation as well. In addition to the problems related directly to the insulation, veterinarians worry about fungal exposure and exposure to other toxins in areas that contain insulation.

I noticed that you are from Quincy, Mass., and although I do not know the age of your home, when I was practicing just south of the Boston area I saw many cases of lead poisoning especially in cats. Because cats are likely to be fastidious in grooming themselves, anything that is on the outside soon gets inside and can be cause for concern.

My advice is to curb your cats' basement expeditions. They may not have run into problems yet, however, these play areas should be strictly off limits from here on out.

Try to make fun, safe play places upstairs (if they are into hunting, hide small caches of food around the house and make them hunt for their meals) where you know they will not be harmed.