

North Shore News

Feeling sick? It's time for a filter change; Does your car make you sick?

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Illustrations: Photo: Terry Peters, North Shore News / Your air filter helps trap bacteria, dust and gases that enter the vehicle's HVAC system.

If you get headaches, allergic reactions or breathing problems riding in your car, it's probably time to change the cabin air filter. Cabin air filters clean the incoming air and remove allergens, and should be replaced every 20,000 to 25,000 kilometres, or per the owner's manual, according to Car Care Canada. More than 80 per cent of new domestic and imported vehicles sold in North America today come equipped with cabin air filtration systems or a slot where one can be installed.

"Many people don't even know they have a cabin air filter in their vehicle and most others aren't aware of the health benefits of maintaining their vehicle's cabin air filter," said race car driver and Car Care Canada spokesperson Kelly Williams. "It's a simple preventive maintenance step that goes a long way toward protecting passengers, as well as the vehicle's heating, ventilating and air-conditioning (HVAC) system."

The cabin air filter helps trap pollen, bacteria, dust and exhaust gases that may find their way into a vehicle's air conditioning and heating and ventilation systems. The filter also prevents leaves, bugs and other debris from entering the HVAC system.

A dirty or clogged cabin air filter can cause musty odors in the vehicle and cause contaminants to become so concentrated in the cabin that passengers actually breathe in more fumes and particles when riding in the car than when walking down the street. A restricted cabin air filter can also impair airflow in the HVAC system, possibly causing interior heating and cooling problems. Over time, the heater and air conditioner may also become damaged by corrosion. Most filters are accessible through an access panel in the HVAC housing, which may be under the hood or in the interior of the car. An automotive service technician can help locate the cabin filter and replace it according to the vehicle's owner manual. Some filters require basic hand tools to remove and install the replacement filter; others just require your hands. Filters should not be cleaned and reinstalled; instead, they should be replaced.

This information was provided by Car Care Canada, a non-profit advocacy group that offers research, consumer education and information about the Canadian automotive aftermarket industry. To learn more, visit the Be Car Care Aware website at www.carcarecanada.ca.