(NU) - Many Americans worry that carpets can contribute to allergies and asthma, but studies suggest that it’s time to sweep those worries under the rug.

Allergens exist in every home. When inhaled, these allergens can cause an immune system response, which manifests as watery eyes, a runny nose, sinus congestion, conjunctivitis or hives. Hay fever, or allergic rhinitis, is a common problem in children and adults. But the problem does not lie with carpeting. In 2002, Research Triangle Institute and University of North Carolina investigators studied two North Carolina schools – one with tile floors, and one with carpets. The study found that airborne allergens existed in higher concentration in the school with tiles.

Why? Carpet can hold a large amount of soil before it looks dirty. While it traps dust and dirt, it also holds potential allergens like mold spores and dander. Allergens cannot cause symptoms unless they become airborne and are able to be inhaled. Serving as a filter, carpet doesn’t allow allergens to enter back into the air. Once trapped, allergens can be easily removed with vacuuming and steam cleaning.

In a recent paper, Dr. Mitchell Sauerhoff, Ph.D., DABT, wrote that “with respect to asthma and allergies, multiple studies have reported fewer allergy and asthma symptoms associated with carpet.”

In addition to allergens, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) may still cause some people concern about their carpets, but scientific evidence suggests that carpets emit very few chemical irritants. According to a study by the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI), carpet VOCs reduce so quickly that they do not pose a health threat. If concerned, consumers should look for low-VOC carpets like those made by Shaw Floors, which meet the CRI’s Green Label Plus standard, the most stringent standard in the industry for low levels of VOCs.

For more information, visit www.shawfloors.com/allergens.