

Mold and Health Effects

What is mold?

Mold is a simple, tiny living organism that grows wherever it gets enough water to reproduce. It eats the material it grows on. It is able to grow on objects that have small amounts of living material such as dirt, grease and dead skin cells. Some molds can produce an unpleasant odor.

Mold will not grow unless water is present. It grows **more quickly if there are water leaks, spills, high humidity or condensation**. Mold can be any color or texture. Moldy hard surface items can be cleaned, but porous objects may need to be thrown out.

Why is mold growing in my house?

Mold is always present in the air, indoors and outdoors. When visible mold is in your house, you have some sort of water problem or a leak. The sooner you fix the water problem the less mold you ~~will have~~ to clean up and the less it will cost. It is best to fix water problems in 24-48 hours.

What symptoms can mold cause?

Some people have symptoms when they are exposed to mold. However, these symptoms can have other causes. These symptoms can include:

- ◆ Allergic reactions - About one person out of ten is allergic to mold. Allergic reactions can include cough, congestion, and rash.
- ◆ Irritation - Sore throat, itchy eyes, runny nose.
- ◆ For asthmatics - Asthma episodes may happen more often because of allergies or irritation from breathing mold.

Respiratory congestion and irritation from mold may lead to more serious conditions such as sinus infections and bronchitis. It is important to remember that not all people are affected the same by mold.

Who is most at risk when exposed to mold?

People with these special concerns should consult a physician. These people may be at higher risk for the health effects of molds:

- ◆ Infants and children
- ◆ Elderly persons
- ◆ Immune compromised people with HIV infection, cancer, liver disease, organ transplant, etc.
- Pregnant women
- ◆ People with existing respiratory conditions, such as allergies, COPD, and asthma.

Even if no one in your home has these problems, ***it is important to quickly identify and correct any moisture sources before mold develops.***

What if I have "Black Mold"?

There are hundreds of thousands of kinds of mold. Many are black. Black molds are no more likely to cause health effects than any other color molds.

If you have mold of any color, it is important to fix the water problem and remove the mold as soon as possible.

What is "toxic mold"?

Some molds produce toxins. Toxins are chemicals that cause cells to break down. Molds that produce toxins do so under certain circumstances. These toxins are produced mainly to kill other mold species. You have to touch, breathe-in or swallow a mold in order to be affected by a toxin. ***Just because a mold is present does not mean that a toxin is present.***

Should I be concerned about mold in my home?

Most people will never have a health problem from being around mold. However, when there is a large amount of airborne mold, it can cause allergic reactions, asthma episodes, infections, and other respiratory problems for people. Exposure to high mold levels can lead to allergies. Care should be taken when cleaning to prevent the spread of mold. Most serious exposures are in the occupational environment, not in the home, school or office environment. If you have mold growing in your home, you should take steps to get rid of it. See *the OIAQC Mold Clean up fact sheet for the proper clean up steps*.

What are other indoor air problems?

It's important to remember that the symptoms just mentioned can come from many other sources in the home, such as:

- ✦ Dust Mites
- ✦ Cockroaches
- ✦ Pet fur and saliva
- ✦ Tobacco smoke
- ✦ Cleaning chemicals
- Pollen
- ✦ Perfumes, air fresheners
- ✦ Pesticides

Should I test my house for mold?

If you can see or smell mold you already know you have a mold and moisture problem. Testing for mold is not generally recommended. Even if the test tells you the kind of mold that is present, the clean up needs will remain the same.

Can my doctor test me for mold?

There are no reliable medical tests for mold exposure. An allergy specialist can test for allergies to only a few of the most common molds.

For more information on mold:

For more information on mold refer to the OIAQC Fact Sheet: *Mold Cleanup: Six steps to get rid of mold you see in your home*.

Web Resources:

A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture and Your Home
www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html

Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings
www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/mold_remediation.html

Mold in Homes, Minnesota Department of Health
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/mold/index.html

