Molds

What are molds?

Molds are small organisms found almost everywhere, inside and outside, including on plants, foods, and leaves. Another common term for mold is "mildew." Molds grow best in warm and damp conditions, although they can grow during cold weather. There are thousands of species of mold, and they can be any color. Many times, mold can be detected by a musty odor. Molds produce microscopic cells called spores that spread easily through the air. Mold spores can survive harsh environmental conditions, such as dry conditions, that do not support normal mold growth. Live spores act like seeds, forming new mold growths, called colonies, under the right conditions.

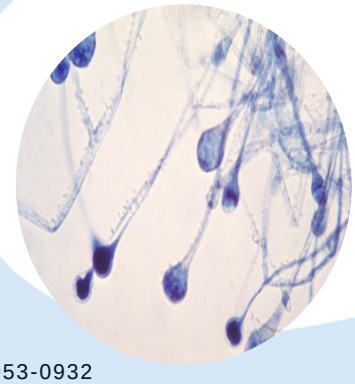
Certain types of molds have proven extremely valuable in the production of antibiotics. Molds are beneficial to the environment and are needed to break down dead material. However, when molds are present in large numbers, they may cause allergic symptoms in people similar to that caused by plant pollen.

How do molds affect people?

In general, we are exposed to molds every day, and most of us don't have any reaction. Under the right conditions, some people may experience allergic reactions such as watery eyes, a runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, itching, coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing, headache and fatigue, These symptoms are temporary and can be eliminated by removing the mold. Molds may also aggravate asthma. In rare cases, infections from building-associated molds may occur in people with seriously weakened immune systems. Some people may be more sensitive to molds than others, including:

- Infants and children
- Elderly people
- Pregnant women
- Individuals with respiratory conditions or allergies and asthma
- Persons with weakened immune systems (for example, chemotherapy patients, organ or bone marrow transplant recipients, and people with HIV infections or autoimmune diseases)

Symptoms that seem to be related to mold exposure can be due to other causes, such as bacterial or viral infections or other allergies. However, see your doctor if you have special health concerns.



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Are there different types of mold?

There are more than 100,000 types of mold. Common classes of mold include *Cladosporium*, *Penicillium*, *Alternaria*, and *Aspergillus*.

What is "Black Mold"?

"Black mold" is a term sometimes used for *Stachybotrys chartarum*, a type of greenish-black mold commonly associated with heavy water damage. It has received quite a bit of media attention in the past few years. Not all molds that appear to be black are *Stachybotrys*. The **known** health effects from exposure to *Stachybotrys* are similar to other common molds. Studies are currently underway that will try to determine if exposure to *Stachybotrys* is associated with more severe health effects.

Are some molds more harmful than others?

Any extensive indoor mold growth should be treated as a potential health concern and removed as soon as practical – regardless of the kind of mold present.

Can mold become a problem in my home/work space?

Molds can grow almost anywhere if there is sufficient moisture.

Be on the lookout for these common sources of moisture:

- Flooding
- Roof leaks
- Plumbing leaks, drainage problems
- Damp basements and crawl spaces
- Steam from the bathroom or kitchen
- Condensation resulting from poor or improper insulation or ventilation
- Humidifiers
- Heating/Air Conditioning System Drip Pan
- Wet clothes drying inside the home or a clothes dryer venting indoors
- Poor or improper ventilation of combustion appliances

Indications of a moisture problem can include discoloration of the ceiling or walls, warping of the floor, or condensation on the walls or windows.

What can I do to get rid of mold indoors?

It is impossible to get rid of all molds because they are everywhere - indoors and outdoors. Mold will not grow if moisture is not present. Indoor mold growth can and should be prevented or controlled by controlling moisture. To get rid of mold growths indoors, the mold must be removed **and** the water problem fixed. Care must be taken with water damaged materials. Some water damaged materials can be cleaned and dried sufficiently for preventing mold growth. However, some materials cannot, and need to be discarded. If you clean up the mold but don't fix the water problem, it is likely that the mold will come back. **The key to preventing mold growth is to control moisture problems.** At work, it's important to let your building manager know about mold issues and/or water leaks as soon as possible to prevent or reduce mold issues from occurring.

For more information:

If you have questions regarding the information in this fact sheet, please contact:
LOCAL POC IF POSSIBLE

Web resources are available at the following links:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/mold/default.htm

U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
http://www.epa.gov/mold/index.html

Occupational Safety and Health Administration
http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib101003.html