

MOLD

WHAT IS MOLD?

Mold is a microscopic fungi that grows into visible colonies under the right conditions. Mold can be found indoors and outdoors year-round. Another common term for mold is mildew.

There are thousands of species and can be white, orange, green, brown, or black. Mold often has a musty odor.

Mold grows in warm and humid conditions, but can also grow during cold weather. Most mold produces microscopic cells called “spores” that spread easily through the air.

HOW DOES MOLD GET INSIDE?

- Water damage
- High humidity
- Dampness
- Flooding
- Roof and plumbing leaks
- Damp basements or crawl spaces
- Any place where moist air condenses on cold surfaces

WHY IS MOLD CONCERNING?

Small amounts of mold are not a major concern. However, large quantities can cause bad odors and health problems for some people.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

Most people have no reaction to mold. However, the following people may be sensitive to mold exposure:

- Persons with weakened immune system (Chemotherapy patients, people with HIV infection, or autoimmune diseases)
- Infants and children
- Individuals with respiratory conditions, allergies, and asthma

WHAT IS THE EFFECT?

- Allergic reactions
 - Runny nose
 - Eye irritation
 - Skin rash
- Flu-like symptoms
- Cough
- Congestion
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Aggravated asthma

Most symptoms are temporary. They can be eliminated by correcting the mold problem.

WHAT IS “BLACK MOLD”?

“Black mold” or “toxic black mold” is associated with a greenish-black mold associated with heavy water damage. The health impact of “black mold” is similar to other common molds.



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WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SEE OR SMELL MOLD?

First, identify and fix the source of moisture that is causing the mold to grow.

- *For small mold growth:* use detergent and water to wash mold off hard surfaces. Use a bleach solution to kill mold. Porous or absorbent materials (e.g. ceiling tiles, wallboard, carpeting) must be replaced.

For more information about cleaning mold, see our *"Cleaning Mold and Mildew"* fact sheet.

SHOULD THE BUILDING BE TESTED FOR MOLD?

Mold and moldy odors rarely require testing. Instead, do the following:

- Inspect for water damage and visible mold growth
- Get rid of visible mold and solve any moisture problems that are causing the mold to grow
- There are no standards for "acceptable" or "unacceptable" levels of mold in buildings

Any testing should be done by a trained specialist.

MORE INFORMATION

Maryland Department of the Environment
American Industrial Hygiene Association
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
MedlinePlus – National Library of Medicine

1-800-633-6101
www.aiha.org
www.epa.gov
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/molds.html

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Adapted from "The Facts About Mold: For Everyone," The American Industrial Hygiene Association.