



Home Tips®



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Q & A

What Is The Problem With Mold?

The new concern seems to be the "Sick House Syndrome" which mainly deals with mold. Just what is the concern with mold and what do you do about it?

Molds are simple, microscopic organisms whose purpose in the ecosystems is to break down dead materials. Molds can be found on plants, dry leaves and about every other organic material. Mold spores are lightweight and are spread by air currents. If spores land on a suitable surface, they will begin to grow. In order to thrive, molds need moisture and food. In a building, drywall, wood, carpet or insulation with organic content can provide food and a growing surface when they are moistened. Mold growth is often seen as a discoloration with many possible colors: white, orange, pink, blue, green, black or brown.



Some molds are useful in making antibiotics and cheese. Other molds are known to be toxic when eaten, such as those that invade grains and peanuts. Still others cause asthma and/or allergic reactions when their spores are inhaled. Mold spores, like pollen from plants, generally cause reactions when airborne, and inhaled in large numbers.

Everyone is exposed to some mold spores in outdoor air, but indoor exposure to molds is generally considered unhealthy. Persons with allergies, existing respiratory problems or suppressed immune systems are more susceptible to health problems from mold exposure. Infants and children, pregnant women and the elderly can be especially sensitive to molds. As humans vary greatly in their chemical make-up, so does

the body's reaction to mold exposure. For some people, a small number of mold spores can cause health problems: for others, it may take many more.

The most common allergic reactions to mold exposure included respiratory problems such as wheezing and difficulty breathing; nasal and sinus congestion; burning, watery, reddened eyes or blurry vision; sore throat; dry cough; nose and throat irritation; shortness of breath; and skin irritation. Other less common effects are: nervous system problems (headaches, memory loss, moodiness); aches and pains; and fever. If residents with such symptoms experience relief when away from the suspect area, the cause may be an allergen, possibly mold.

"RED FLAGS" WHICH SUGGEST MOLD TESTING

Indoor Air Quality experts look for "red flags" for mold when conducting inspections. When these conditions exist, they recommend testing for mold. Testing is normally done where there is dampness, where there are water stains or where there is visible mold. If known toxic or allergenic species are found which are not normally indoors, further steps are recommended to remove the mold and conditions which promote mold growth. Professional help is recommended if someone in the home seems to be ill from exposure. Large areas of visible mold (over 100 square feet), should only be tested and removed by a professional.

● **MOISTURE**: Mold grows where there is a moist environment. You should test for mold with discovery of any water related structural or design problem:

1. Evidence of water penetrating the home (stains or moist areas).
2. Conditions that allow water in the home (poor grading, flashing or gutters).
3. Defects or deterioration that might allow water in the home (flashing, roofs, decks, windows, concrete slab and vapor barriers).
4. Plumbing (leaky drains, pipes or toilet seals, missing caulk on fixtures).
5. Heating and air conditioning (dirty, moist filters, condensation leaks).
6. Dryer vented indoors; inadequate ventilation for a bath or spa.

● **SENSITIVITY**: Human senses may help you to detect mold:

1. If you or others think there is a musty odor.
2. If you feel a room has a damp atmosphere, walls or floor.
3. If one of the occupants complains of allergy-like symptoms, which seem to increase while in the home, they may be caused by mold.

● **TESTING**: If active molds are found or are suspected, samples should be taken to determine the type of mold and

