

What are Molds?

Molds are simple, microscopic organisms, present virtually everywhere, indoors and outdoors. Molds, along with mushrooms and yeasts, are fungi and are needed to break down dead material and recycle nutrients in the environment. For molds to grow and reproduce, they need only a food source – any organic material, such as leaves, wood, paper, or dirt— and moisture. Because molds grow by digesting the organic material, they gradually destroy whatever they grow on. Sometimes, new molds grow on old mold colonies. Mold growth on surfaces can often be seen in the form of discoloration, frequently green, gray, brown, or black but also white and other colors. Molds release countless tiny, lightweight spores, which travel through the air.



How am I exposed to indoor molds?

Everyone is exposed to some mold on a daily basis without evident harm. It is common to find mold spores in the air inside homes, and most of the airborne spores found indoors come from outdoor sources. Mold spores primarily cause health problems when they are present in large numbers and people inhale many of them. This occurs primarily when there is active mold growth within home, office or school where people live or work. People can also be exposed to mold by touching contaminated materials and by eating contaminated foods.

Can mold become a problem in my home?

Molds will grow and multiply whenever conditions are right—sufficient moisture is available and organic material is present. Be on the lookout in your home for common sources of indoor moisture that may lead to mold problems:

- ◆ Flooding ◆ Leaky roofs
- ◆ Sprinkler spray hitting the house
- ◆ Plumbing leaks ◆ Humidifiers
- ◆ Overflow from sinks or sewers
- ◆ Damp basement or crawl space
- ◆ Steam from shower or cooking
- ◆ Wet clothes drying indoors or clothes dryers exhausting indoors



Warping floors and discoloration of walls and ceilings can be indications of moisture problems. Condensation on windows or walls is also an important indication, but it can sometimes be caused by an indoor combustion problem! Have fuel-burning appliances routinely inspected by your local utility or a professional heating contractor.



Should I be concerned about mold in my home?

Yes, if indoor mold contamination is extensive, it can cause very high and persistent airborne spore exposures. Persons exposed to high spore levels can become sensitized and develop allergies to the mold or other health problems. Mold growth can damage your furnishings, such as carpets, sofas and cabinets. Clothes and shoes in damp closets can become soiled. In time, unchecked mold growth can cause serious damage to the structural elements in your home.

What symptoms are commonly seen with mold exposure?

Molds produce health effects through inflammation, allergy, or infection. Allergic reactions (often referred to as hay fever) are most common following mold exposure. Typical symptoms that mold-exposed persons report (alone or in combination) include:

- ◆ Respiratory problems, such as wheezing, difficulty breathing, and shortness of breath
- ◆ Nasal & sinus congestion
- ◆ Eye irritation (burning, watery, or reddened eyes)
- ◆ Dry, hacking cough
- ◆ Nose or throat irritation
- ◆ Skin rashes or irritation
- ◆ Miscarriage



Headaches, memory problems, mood swings, nosebleeds, body aches and pains, and fevers are occasionally reported in mold cases, but their cause is not understood.

How much mold can make me sick?

It depends. For some people, a relatively small number of mold spores can trigger an asthma attack or lead to other health problems. For other persons, symptoms may occur only when exposure levels are much higher. Nonetheless, indoor mold growth is unsanitary and undesirable. Basically, if you can see or smell mold inside your home, take steps to identify and eliminate the excess moisture and to cleanup and remove the mold.



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