

Fact Sheet



NH Department of Health & Human Services
Bureau of Environmental & Occupational Health
Indoor Air Quality Program
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MOLD IN THE HOME: HEALTH CONCERNS

This fact sheet provides information to people about health concerns related to mold exposure. It also provides general guidelines about mold detection, cleanup, and removal of mold contaminated materials.

Key Points:

- Without water, mold cannot survive.
- All molds are potential health hazards and should be removed.
- Sampling for mold is expensive and usually not necessary. If you see it, remove it.
- Guidelines for clean-up and removal are provided on page 4.

What is Mold?

Molds are microscopic organisms that are found virtually everywhere both indoors and outdoors. Molds are types of fungi that live on plants, foods, dry leaves, wood and other organic materials. Mold spores are tiny structures that are the reproductive part of the microorganism. A group of mold spores can be seen by the naked eye. The spores often look velvety or powdery, and appear in colors ranging from pale white, yellow, orange, or green, to dark brown or black. The spores are very tiny and light weight, allowing them to travel through the air. Sometimes some mold spores can cause allergic symptoms similar to those caused by plant pollen.

Mold needs two things to grow:

- 1) a wet or damp environment, and
- 2) food sources such as leaves, wood, paper products, wall board, insulation materials, ceiling tiles and other organic based materials.

Should I be concerned about mold in my Home?

Yes,

When old spores are present in large amounts, they may cause allergic reactions, trigger asthma episodes, and other respiratory problems. It is important to remove mold from hard, nonporous surfaces, and to discard porous items that are contaminated with mold, because even the dead spores can cause allergy and other respiratory problems. Mold itself also causes structural damage to your home.

Who are at increased risk when exposed to mold?

Exposure to large amounts of mold inside buildings is not healthy for anyone. Visible mold should be cleaned up as soon as possible (within 2 days). It is then important to quickly identify and correct any moisture sources before mold levels increase and health problems develop. The following groups of people appear to be at higher risk for ill health effects due to mold exposure:

- infants and children
- elderly
- immune compromised patients (people with HIV infection, cancer, autoimmune disease, liver disease, anyone receiving chemotherapy)
- individuals with existing respiratory conditions or sensitivities such as allergies and asthma

Are some molds more hazardous than others?

Yes, but all molds are potentially harmful. Some of the natural by-products of mold metabolism are chemicals that can cause irritation or allergy. Certain types of molds can produce mycotoxins which are chemicals that are toxic to humans, animals, and plants. Exposure to mycotoxins may present a greater hazard to occupants than exposure to allergenic or irritative mold by-product. Mycotoxins have been found in agricultural settings, in foods, and indoor spaces of homes and office building. Health effects observed in humans vary with a person's health status, the specific toxin, the amount of exposure, and the route of exposure. However, in most instances it is far more important to eliminate mold and remove moisture sources than to spend time and resources counting and indentifying what type of mold is present.

What About Stachybotrys?

One mold, *Stachybotrys chartarum* (SC), has received media attention. SC is a dark greenish-black, oily-looking mold that grows on materials with high cellulose content (sheetrock, wood, etc.) that are constantly soaked with water. **SC does not grow on materials usually found in bathrooms.** SC needs lots of water to survive and is a relatively uncommon mold. SC produces a mycotoxin and is suspected of causing health effects more serious than the irritation caused by most mold. However, it has not been proven that SC causes these other health effects.

Should I test my home for mold?

The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Resources-Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health does not recommend testing as the first step to determine if you have a mold problem. Mold sampling can be very expensive. There are no air standards for levels of mold indoors. If you can see or smell mold or mildew, you have a moisture and mold problem. The first step is to clean, disinfect, and dry out the moldy area. Then it is important to identify the moisture source and correct it. Air testing almost never affects the final recommendations.