

Fact Sheet

Mold



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What are Molds?



Molds are fungi that can be found both indoors and outdoors. No one knows how many species of fungi exist but estimates range from tens of thousands to perhaps three hundred thousand or more. Molds grow best in warm, damp, and humid conditions, and spread by making spores. Mold spores can survive harsh environmental conditions, such as dry conditions, that do not support normal mold growth. Some common indoor molds are:

- Cladosporium
- Penicillium
- Alternaria
- Aspergillus

Exposure

Molds are found in virtually every environment and can be detected indoors and outdoors and year round. Mold growth is encouraged by warm and humid conditions. Outdoors they can be found in shady, damp areas or places where leaves or other vegetation is decomposing. Indoors they can be found where humidity levels are high, such as basements or showers.

Health Effects

Some people are sensitive to molds. For these people, exposure to molds can cause symptoms such as nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, wheezing, or skin irritation. Some people, such as those with serious allergies to molds, may have more severe reactions. Severe reactions may occur among workers exposed to large amounts of molds in occupational settings, such as farmers working around moldy hay. Severe reactions may include fever and shortness of breath. Some people with chronic lung illnesses, such as obstructive lung disease, may develop mold infections in their lungs.

How to Decrease Mold Exposure

Sensitive individuals should avoid areas that are likely to have mold, such as compost piles, cut grass, and wooded areas. Inside homes, mold growth can be slowed by controlling humidity levels and ventilating showers and cooking areas. If there is mold growth in the home, clean up the mold and fix the water problem. Mold growth can be removed from hard surfaces with commercial products, soap and water, or a bleach solution of no more than 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water.

If choosing to use bleach to clean up mold:

- Never mix bleach with ammonia or other household cleaners. Mixing bleach with ammonia or other cleaning products will produce dangerous, toxic fumes.
- Open windows and doors to provide fresh air.
- Wear non-porous gloves and protective eye wear.
- If the area to be cleaned is more than 10 square feet, consult the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guide titled *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings*. Although focused

on schools and commercial buildings, this document also applies to other building types. You can get it by going to the EPA web site at http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html.

- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using bleach or any other cleaning product.

Some other specific recommendations on how to decrease mold growth are:

- Keep humidity levels as low as possible, no higher than 40%, all day long. An air conditioner or dehumidifier will help to keep the level low. Bear in mind that humidity levels change over the course of a day with changes in the moisture in the air and the air temperature, so check the humidity levels more than once a day.
- Use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier during humid months.
- Be sure the home has adequate ventilation, including exhaust fans.
- Add mold inhibitors to paints before application.
- Clean bathrooms with mold killing products.
- Do not carpet bathrooms, kitchens and basements.
- Remove or replace previously soaked carpets and upholstery.
- Clean and repair roof gutters regularly.
- Make sure the ground slopes away from the building foundation, so that water does not enter or collect around the foundation.
- Keep air conditioning drip pans clean and the drain lines unobstructed and flowing properly.

When water leaks or spills occur, **act quickly**. If wet or damp materials or areas are dried 24 hours after a leak or spill happens, in most cases mold will not grow.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES www.michigan.gov/mdhs

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY www.epa.gov