

Mold: Dealing With the Issues

Mold and Your Health

Exposure to damp and moldy environments may cause a variety of health effects, or none at all. Some people are sensitive to molds. For these people, molds can cause nasal stuffiness, throat irritation, coughing or wheezing, eye irritation, or, in some cases, skin irritation. People with mold allergies may have more severe reactions. Immune-compromised people and people with chronic lung illnesses need to follow their physician's guidance. Areas to avoid with typically high concentrations of mold include: compost piles, cut grass, and wooded areas.

Where are molds found?

Molds are found in virtually every environment and can be detected both indoors and outdoors, year round. Mold growth is encouraged by warm and humid conditions. Outdoor mold 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.

Testing for Mold

Generally, it is not necessary to identify the species of mold growing in a building, and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) does not recommend routine sampling for molds. Current evidence indicates that allergies are most often associated with molds. Since the susceptibility of individuals can vary greatly either because of the amount or type of mold, sampling and culturing are not reliable in determining your health risk. If you are susceptible to mold and mold is seen or smelled, there is a potential health risk; therefore, no matter what type of mold is present, you should arrange for its removal. Furthermore, reliable sampling for mold can be expensive, and standards for judging what is and what is not an acceptable or a tolerable quantity of mold have not been established.

Are we at risk for our exposure to mold?

In general, when considering the risk of occupant exposure to indoor mold growth, the following should be recognized:

- ✓ No accepted quantitative standards currently exist by which to assess the health risks related to fungal exposure. Since mold and other fungal spores are common in the natural environment, most guidelines focus on the amount and location of visible mold growth and comparison of indoor and outdoor spore levels.
- ✓ Airborne spore levels can vary greatly over time due to changes in environmental conditions and activity patterns.
- ✓ Based on the potential for allergic reactions, mold growth and dampness in buildings should be controlled. Areas where mold is found should be addressed in order to promote a healthful indoor environment.

What to do if you suspect you have health effects from mold in your workspace.

If you have allergic reactions when you are in your work area and they diminish when you are not, contact EH&S and ask for a preliminary investigation.

If you are aware of a water source or leak that is providing moisture for the mold to grow, place a work order with PP-CS for repair.

If you call PP-CS or EH&S, and if practicable, leave the mold in place as it will help them find the source of the water.

You always have the option to remove the mold. Anyone who does not have an allergic reaction when near mold can clean small amounts of mold (one square foot or less), but should use the following procedures at minimum:

- (1) spray the surface with a cleaner/disinfectant such as Windex®, or a Clorox bleach solution of about 10%,
- (2) use a single-use material, like paper towels, to wipe the area and dispose of the used material in a closed container,
- (3) dry the surface with a single-use material and dispose in the same way,
- (4) monitor the area daily to determine if further actions should be taken to eliminate the source of moisture and recurrence of mold.

If you would like more information on mold, EH&S suggests reading the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website web page, CDC Publications on Exposure to Mold and Related health Effects: http://www.cdc.gov/mold/pdfs/rr5508_app.pdf

Additional Resources

National Institutes for Health: <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/mold/index.cfm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/mold/faqs.htm>

Statement on Building Dampness, Mold, and Health: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDC/PHP/DEODC/EHIB/CPE/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Mold/DMH Stmt ENG.pdf>

