

1. What is mold?

Mold, along with other types fungi, are organisms that lack chlorophyll and usually produce spores. They are ubiquitous on our planet, including both indoor and outdoor environments, and play a vital role in the earth's ecology by decomposing organic substances necessary for sustaining plant and animal life. Molds are incredibly resilient since an available food source, water and time are the only requirements needed for mold to germinate and grow. Molds survive by using plants and decaying organic matter for food and are reproduced by releasing tiny spores that are carried by air currents to other locations.

Outdoor molds can be a source of indoor mold as these microscopic spores and mold fragments can enter a home or a building in many ways, depending on prevailing wind and climactic conditions, such as: fresh air intake via ventilation units, movement through gaps in a building's structure or open doors and windows, transportation in on practically all materials brought into a building, or carried on the clothing of humans and coats of pets.

2. What causes mold to grow inside a building and how can I prevent it from growing?

Typically, outdoor concentrations of most molds and fungi are higher than indoor concentrations, unless there is a local source of mold growth within the structure itself. To grow indoors, mold needs moisture and food. Floods; leaking pipes, windows and roofs; increased ambient humidity due to inadequate ventilation and air conditioning; improper drying of flooded areas; operating a hot tub inside a house without an adequate exhaust mechanism; and poor housekeeping habits are all potential sources of moisture that can lead to mold amplification.

Besides moisture, mold needs nutrients, or food, to grow. Mold can grow on virtually any organic substance. Most buildings are full of organic materials that mold can use as food, including paper, cloth, wood, plant material, settled dust and soil. In most cases, temperature is not an issue; some molds grow in warm areas, while others prefer cool locations such as strawberries stored in a refrigerator. Often, more than one type of mold can be found growing in the same area, although conditions such as moisture, light, and temperature may favor one species of mold over another.

The easiest way to prevent mold from growing indoors is to stop the source of water and/or moisture intrusion. Use exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens and use air conditioning systems or dehumidifiers in humid environments. Fix leaks and clean up spills immediately. As a rule of thumb, mold will start to grow within 24-48 hours if moisture issues are not remediated.

3. What is "black mold"?

Molds come in many colors including white. “Black mold” is not a species or specific kind of mold, and neither is “toxic mold.” Sometimes the news media use the terms “toxic mold” and “black mold” to refer to molds that may produce mycotoxins or for a specific mold, *Stachybotrys chartarum*. Molds that produce mycotoxins are often referred to as toxigenic fungi.

4. What are the health effects of mold exposure?

Inhalation exposure to mold indoors can cause health effects in some people. Molds produce allergens, irritants, and, in some cases, potentially toxic substances or chemicals (mycotoxins). Inhaling or touching mold or mold spores, either dead or alive, may cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals.

Allergic reactions to mold are common and can be immediate or delayed. Repeated or single exposure to mold, mold spores, or mold fragments may cause non-sensitive individuals to become sensitive to mold, and repeated exposure has the potential to increase sensitivity. Allergic responses include hay fever-like symptoms such as headache, sneezing, runny nose, red eyes, and skin rash (dermatitis). Molds can cause asthma attacks in people with asthma who are allergic to mold. In addition, molds can irritate the eyes, skin, nose, throat, and lungs of individuals whether or not they are allergic to mold.

Breathing in mold may also cause hypersensitivity pneumonitis, an uncommon disease that resembles bacterial pneumonia. In addition, mold exposure may result in opportunistic infections in persons whose immune systems are weakened or suppressed.

When mold grows indoors, the occupants of a building may begin to report odors and a variety of symptoms including headaches, difficulty breathing, skin irritation, allergic reactions, and aggravated asthma symptoms. These and other symptoms may be associated with exposure to mold. But all of these symptoms may also be caused by other exposures or conditions unrelated to mold growth. Therefore, it is important not to assume that whenever any of these symptoms occurs, mold is the cause.

5. I think I have a mold problem in my home or office building. What should I do?

A building investigation and a risk assessment should be conducted to determine if your building has an indoor environmental quality issue related to mold. The goal of a building investigation and a risk assessment is to identify areas of water and/or moisture intrusion and to determine the extent of the mold and water damage and the most appropriate corrective actions.

A response team of medical professionals and environmental specialists can manage the incident, evaluate those who are ill and conduct town hall meetings to effectively communicate with residents/occupants, employees, families, media and others who are impacted by the potential mold exposures.

For more information related to mold and mold exposures please contact us at solutions@coagencyteam.com.