

Mold in the Home

What is Mold?

Molds are part of our environment. They can be found everywhere, inside and out. The term "mold" describes thousands of species of microscopic fungi which grow on wet organic matter. Often they are "furry" and can come in every color of the rainbow.

Molds need moisture to grow. Inside the home molds will begin to grow on damp surfaces like bathroom walls and trim around windows.

There is no practical way to eliminate all mold and mold spores from indoor environments, the key is to control moisture.

Health Effects of Mold

Most types of mold are not hazardous to healthy individuals. However, some people are more sensitive to molds than others, especially people with asthma and/or allergies. The most common symptoms are cold-like symptoms such as watery eyes, sore throat, runny nose, coughs, and congestion.

What is Toxic Mold?

In recent years there has been much discussion about "toxic" or "killer" molds. *Stachybotrys chartarum* (also known as *Stachybotrys atra*) is a blackish mold that grows on materials with high cellulose content. It can grow on paper, cardboard, wallboard, wall framing, or dropped ceiling tiles. It is a type of mold that needs a very high moisture content to grow, so these materials will need to be wet for several weeks. *Stachybotrys* can only be identified in a laboratory through a microscopic exam.

How do I know if there is mold in my home?

Mold is easy to identify. Many times you can see mold colonies growing, or you know it is there because the area has a "musty" smell. Testing for mold is usually not recommended because it can be an expensive proposition. There are no "Standards" for levels of mold in a residential environment, so it is usually better to look for mold when its presence is suspected.

Cleaning Up Mold

Mold can best be controlled by controlling moisture. It is important to dry any water damaged areas within 24 -48 hours. The homeowner can clean areas less than a few square feet. Larger areas should be left to the professionals.

- Use a mask or respirator and rubber gloves.
- Dampen the moldy materials before removal to minimize airborne spores.
- Clean hard surfaces by scrubbing with a non-ammonia soap or detergent.

It is impossible to remove mold completely from porous materials such as ceiling tiles, drywall and carpet padding, so these materials should be discarded.

This fact sheet provides information from the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service.

For more information contact your local county Extension office. Summer, 2005

It is the policy of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service, David C. Petritz, Director, that all persons shall have equal opportunity and access to the programs and facilities without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, or disability. Purdue University is an Affirmative Action employer. This material may be available in alternative formats