



MOLD

What is it? Where is it?

Mold is a tiny plant that occurs naturally everywhere in the environment. Outdoors, molds are beneficial, promoting the decomposition of dead organic material. In homes, however, molds can be harmful in two ways. First, they damage building materials. Second, they may cause unhealthy reactions in some people. Medical research indicates that mold is the number one cause of allergic symptoms. That's why weather reports frequently include a "mold count." Also, a few species of mold emit mycotoxins that can cause significant health problems in susceptible individuals.

Although mold spores are in the air, both indoors and out, they can become more concentrated in the air of your home if mold is allowed to grow inside your house. Central heating and air conditioning systems recirculate air throughout the house, so as the molds produce spores, their number in the indoor air continues to increase. This has no effect on most of us, but individuals who are sensitive or allergic to mold may experience unhealthy symptoms.

How is mold identified?

Most of us know what mold and related plants look and smell like. Since we don't want *any* mold or mildew growing in our homes, identification of the particular species is not generally necessary.

What can be done about mold?

Although spores land on surfaces everywhere, they will only survive and grow where there is sufficient moisture. *To prevent the growth of mold, it is necessary to keep all surfaces dry.* Check frequently for leaks and condensation around plumbing pipes and correct these conditions immediately. Clean up any spills promptly. In humid climates, dehumidifiers will help remove dampness from the air, so that moisture doesn't collect in areas you can't get to, e.g. behind drywall and wallpaper. Remember that basements are particularly vulnerable to moisture problems.

If you find mold growing in your home, you must do two things to be rid of it: 1. remove it and 2. prevent its return by eliminating its source of moisture.

In most cases, mold can be removed from hard surfaces by cleaning with water and detergent or a commercial cleaner. Porous materials like carpet, ceiling tiles, and insulation may have to be discarded to eliminate the mold growing in them. If the area affected by mold is extensive, you may need to hire a contractor who specializes in mold remediation.

Where can I get further information?

The Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov) and the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) are excellent sources of free information on mold.