

Got Mold?

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Mold has become a genuine concern for business owners, homeowners, and anyone planning a real estate deal. The presence of mold can delay or kill a real estate deal. And while most mold is benign, how does the average person know if their mold situation is benign or toxic? The fact is that some species of mold are indeed toxic and can cause serious health issues. This e-newsletter demystifies mold so you will know what to do if you find some.

What causes mold?

Generally, mold grows when suitable conditions are present in either an indoor and outdoor environment. Mold requires a food source (an organic substance) in the presence of moisture. In fact, mold growth is always a symptom of an underlying moisture or water-intrusion problem. And sometimes mold can appear seemingly overnight--within 24 to 48 hours under some circumstances. Mold will often grow on building materials (i.e. sheetrock, wood, ceiling tiles, etc.) when they are exposed to excessive moisture or water conditions such as flooding, water pipe leaks, high relative humidity conditions, condensation, or other factors.. Mold cannot grow in the absence of moisture.

Where am I likely to find mold?

Basements and crawlspaces often harbor mold because of high humidity or periodic water intrusion. Mold will also grow near a chronic leak from a pipe or fitting. Another common locale for mold is in the attic, beneath leaky shingles or a loose flashing. The outdoor environment is also suitable for mold to grow, especially on building materials such as vinyl siding, cedar shakes, roofs, patio furniture, and fencing. Check the north-facing sides of buildings where there is little or no sun exposure.

How do I know if I have mold?

Mold can be seen or smelled. Mold is normally easy to spot when it begins to grow and spread. Unusual surface discoloration requires investigation. Remember mold colors can vary considerably. Do not touch or disturb mold if it is black or emitting spores. Some black molds (especially one known as *Stachybotrys*) are toxic. Careless disturbance of sporulating mold can release vast amounts of spores into the air. Even benign molds (like bread mold) can create a bad reaction when large amounts are inhaled.

Some molds have a telltale musty odor. Often, a musty odor signals a hidden mold problem—one that is behind walls or furniture and therefore difficult to see. If you can smell mold you may have a situation that requires attention.

Do I need to test for mold?

Perhaps. If mold is obvious, you may not need to do any testing. Instead you might be able to remediate the mold if the extent is small in area (less than 2 square feet). But if you suspect that mold may be present in larger areas, Environmental Strategies & Applications, Inc. (ESA) can collect samples to look for mold spores. This can be accomplished by several methods. For example, sometimes it is appropriate to take surface samples. Other times it is better to collect air samples. The samples are then submitted to a laboratory to identify the types of mold and determine mold spore counts. Mold spore counts are then compared to a “control” sample, usually taken outdoors. ESA uses certified laboratories for microbiological analyses.

Testing also provides a baseline of existing conditions that is compared against post-mold remediation sampling efforts to document the effectiveness of the mold cleanup. It is always wise to engage an independent testing company (like ESA) to verify the adequacy of the remediation effort. Avoid remediation companies which also provide post-remedial testing services because they present an inherent conflict of interest.

Is mold harmful?

Mold can be harmful when large amounts of spores are inhaled. For starters, many mold spores can trigger allergic reactions even during periods when seasonal allergies don't pose problems. Typical allergenic mold spores include *Cladosporium* which is very common outdoors. Of even greater concerns are the species of mold spores, such as *Aspergillus*, *Chaetomium*, *Penicillium*, and *Stachybotrys* (black mold) that can cause hypersensitivity pneumonitis (HP) and other respiratory problems especially in immune-compromised individuals. Worse, however, some molds harbor mycotoxins (i.e., *Aspergillus* and *Stachybotrys*) that can be especially harmful to humans because they can cause memory loss and respiratory problems.

How do I remedy a mold problem?

When ESA identifies a mold condition that requires remediation, we provide the names of reputable mold remediation contractors. Most mold is remediated by removing the affected substrates. But remember, remediation will be futile unless you alleviate the ongoing source of moisture.

ESA also offers post-mold remediation verification/assessment to document the effectiveness of the mold cleanup, determine if additional mold remediation is required, and provide clearance for re-occupancy and/or restoration of the work areas.

What if I suspect that I have a mold problem?

Call ESA for assistance. ESA provides advice over the phone and, when needed, schedules a site visit. ESA's mold professionals can determine if a potential high moisture condition exists, and/or if water-intrusion pathways exist or other factors may be causing the mold condition.

About the Author

Mr. Dallas is a Certified Indoor Environmental Consultant (CIEC) by the American Council for Accredited Certification (ACAC) and a member of the Indoor Air Quality Association (IAQA). Mr. Dallas has spent more than 20 years conducting indoor air quality investigations, bacterial and mold assessments in New Jersey. Mr. Dallas is recognized by many realtors, banks, attorneys, insurance companies, contractors, developers, property managers, architects, engineers, home owners and business owners, as an ethical, competent, knowledgeable business professional who provides a high level of service and professionalism.

Call ESA today for a FREE mold consultation at 732-469-8888.

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