

Mold – The Fungus That’s Among Us

Quick Tips

Mold Basics – Molds are living organisms that are classified as fungi and are part of the natural environment. Molds can be found anywhere (indoors or outdoors) and at any time of the year. It is estimated that 100,000 species of mold exist throughout the world and approximately 1,000 species can be found in the United States alone. Molds play an important role in nature, breaking down organic matter such as fallen trees, vegetation and dead animals through decomposition. Without mold, we would not have certain foods, such as cheese or yogurt, nor would we have life-saving medicines, such as penicillin.

Molds can grow on virtually any surface so long as there is moisture, oxygen and a food source present. Molds reproduce by producing microscopic spores which travel through the air and are deposited onto surfaces where they can germinate, grow and begin digesting organic materials.

Mold spores are introduced into buildings through HVAC systems, open doors & windows, pets and foot traffic. When they land, they will germinate and begin to grow. Negative effects of mold on structures can range from unsightly stains to degradation of indoor air quality. It is impossible to eliminate all molds and spores inside a building; controlling moisture is the key to controlling mold.



Health Effects – Currently, there are no regulatory standards or recommendations (EPA or OSHA) for airborne concentrations of mold and/or spores. There is much debate and research on the relationship between mold exposures and health effects. Most indoor airborne exposures to mold do not present a risk of adverse health effects. Health effects may be immediate or delayed, and include:

- Allergic reactions resembling hay fever
- Asthma attacks in people that are allergic to mold
- Irritation of the eyes, skin, nose & throat
- Localized infections of the skin or mucous membranes

Evaluation – Some mold growth may give off an odor. People vary in their sensitivity to odor so the best way to detect mold is by using tools such as moisture meters, IR/thermal cameras and/or a borescope. Moisture meters and IR cameras are used to test surfaces for water content or cold spots, where water is evaporating. A borescope is used to probe behind surfaces to look for mold growth and/or damage.

