



Iowa Department of Public Health Division of Environmental Health

Frequently Asked Questions about Mold

Overview: Mold is a natural part of the outdoor environment. Mold is present in outdoor air at some level throughout the year. In order for mold to grow indoors, there must be a significant source of water, moisture or humidity. Mold is found through simple visual inspection. Once a mold problem is identified, the first step to solving the problem is to get rid of the moisture. Once the moisture problem is solved, the mold can be cleaned or removed. Homeowners can use a mild household detergent and water solution to clean mold off of non-porous surfaces. For porous surfaces, it is recommended that items are removed, discarded and replaced.

What are the health effects from exposure to mold?



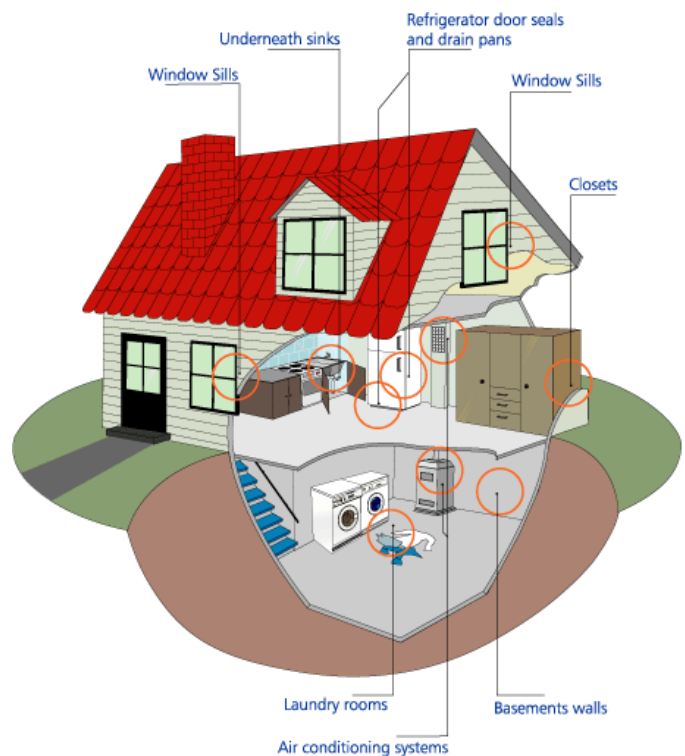
In general, mold only causes an allergic reaction. Symptoms of an allergic reaction are itchy or watery eyes, runny nose, sinus drainage, respiratory discomfort and cough. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 50% of the population of the United States is allergic to mold. If you are NOT allergic to mold, there will be NO health effects from exposure. If you ARE allergic to mold, your reaction depends on the sensitivity of your allergy.

How do I know if I have a mold problem?

Mold problems are ALWAYS caused by a moisture or water problem. It does no good to clean up the mold, if you haven't solved the water issue first. Environmental professionals "inspect" for mold through simple visual examination. There is no special state of Iowa training or certification for mold inspectors.

Where should I look for mold?

Most homeowners can tell if they have a mold issue in their home. Simply look for mold in places where there may be water issues (under sinks, in laundry rooms, kitchens, bathrooms, where a roof has leaked, in the basement, etc.) Very simply, if you see mold in your home, you have mold. If you don't see mold in your home, you probably don't have mold.



I have mold in my home and I want to have it tested, what should I do?

The Iowa Department of Public Health does **NOT** recommend testing for mold for several reasons:

1. Mold is a natural part of our environment.
2. Mold is present at some level in outdoor air throughout the year.
3. It is very difficult, even for professionals, to get meaningful test results for mold.
4. Mold testing is very costly.
5. There are no regulatory levels or guidelines for comparing results.

There is black mold in my home, What if it is the toxic kind you see on TV?

There are thousands of different types of mold in the environment that come in a variety of colors. Just because a mold is black does not mean that it is any more or less toxic than mold that is green, blue, yellow or orange.

There has been a lot of media attention about a particular type of mold, Stachybotrys that has been reported to be very toxic. In the middle to late 1990's there was an indication that this type of mold was linked to a respiratory disease called acute idiopathic hemorrhagic airway disease. Currently, it is believed there is no link between mold exposure and this disease, which causes bleeding in the lungs. In reality, all molds may cause the same type and severity of health reaction. No matter what color the mold is in your home, it still needs to be cleaned up in the same way.



I've identified the area covered in mold, how do I clean it up?

It depends on the type of material that the mold is growing on. If the material is **non-porous** (it **will not** absorb water) such as a concrete, tile or vinyl flooring, plastic patio furniture, plastic toys, tub surrounds, paneling, molding, etc., use a mild household detergent solution to wipe away the mold. If it is a **porous** surface (it **will** absorb water) such as drywall, carpeting, furniture, bedding, clothing, stuffed animals, books, etc., remove, discard, and replace the items or surfaces the mold is growing on.



What if the mold is trapped behind a wall, in a crawl space or in the attic?

In order for there to be mold behind a wall, in a crawl space or attic, there would have to be a water, moisture, or humidity problem to feed the mold. Most likely if the mold is behind the walls or in the attic, you are not being exposed to it, so there should not be a problem. If the water problem persists in the area, the mold will eventually work its way through the wall, ceiling, or floor and become obvious.

The best way to check for mold is through visual inspection, or looking for it. If there is access to an area behind the wall or in the attic, use a flashlight to look for the mold. If not, the only way to determine if there is mold would be to cut a hole and look. This is typically not recommended.

For More information contact:

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