

# Introduction to

# MOLD





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## INTRODUCTION

Around the country, an increasing number of people are reporting a variety of symptoms related to the presence of mold growing in homes and businesses. While it is often assumed that mold will only grow in instances in which there has been a serious flood or a natural disaster, as we will discover in this guide; that is not always the case.

Mold does require moisture in order to grow, but many people are surprised by the fact that mold actually only requires a minimal amount of moisture in order to begin growing. Even if your home has not been the victim of a serious flood, you may still have mold growing in your home.

There is also another common misconception that if you have mold growing in your home, you will be able to see it. This is also not true. You could very well have mold growing in your home at this precise moment and never know it. Mold does have a distinct odor, but it is also very sneaking at hiding in locations in the home where you would never see it or suspect it, such as the air ducts of your home.

This can be an extremely dangerous situation because the spores from the mold can be disbursed throughout the home and may be affecting you, your family and anyone else who enters the home. In order to protect yourself, your family and others, it is imperative to learn as much as possible about mold, including how it grows, areas that are most susceptible to the growth of mold and what you can do to prevent mold from growing in your home. It is also important to understand how to effectively remediate mold if you notice it growing in your home and what you can do to keep it from coming back in the future.

In this guide we are going to examine all of that and much more to keep your home free from mold.

Let's get started!





## CHAPTER 1

### **What is Mold?**

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Mold is actually part of the natural environment that surrounds us. In the outdoors, molds play an important role in nature by breaking down organic matter that is already dead, such as trees and fallen leaves. The problem with mold occurs when it is present indoors. Mold reproduces and creates tiny spores. Those spores cannot be seen by the naked eye, but they do float through the air; both indoors and outdoors. Most often, mold begins growing indoors when mold spores land on wet surfaces. There are actually many different types of mold. All of the various types of mold must have moisture or water in order to grow.

While mold invades homes throughout all parts of the country, it doesn't always cause a problem. Many people are able to handle low-level exposure to mold. The real problem begins when mold begins to multiply and gains access to organic material, such as food, paper, wood, soil, fabric or leaves. When mold begins growing in your home, it can become a serious health risk.

Molds do have the potential to cause serious health issues. Molds produce allergens, which are the substances that result in allergic reactions. They also produce irritants and in some cases can produce toxic substances known as mycotoxins. When you inhale or touch mold or mold spores, you may experience an allergic reaction if you are particularly sensitive. The symptoms associated with a reaction to mold can vary, but may include allergy type symptoms such as red eyes, sneezing, runny nose and skin rash. It is fairly common to have a reaction to mold. The reaction may be delayed or immediate. Molds can also result in asthma attacks in individuals with asthma.

Mold exposure can also result in irritation to the skin, eyes, throat, nose and lungs; regardless of whether you are allergic or not. Research regarding the effects of mold on health is ongoing.

#### **Understanding the Seriousness of Mold**

The subject of mold is one that is frequently misunderstood and can represent serious health dangers. Many people frequently make the mistake of believing that mold is simply dust that poses no serious risk. Unfortunately, many people never even realize they or their family members have been affected by mold until it is far too late.

One of the reasons there is often such confusion about mold is because the symptoms related to mold poisoning can vary so much. The symptoms of mold poisoning can often vary from one person to another. This is because everyone's immune systems are different. Not only can the symptoms vary among different people, but the length of time between exposure and the presentation of symptoms can vary as well.

Persons who have been exposed to toxic mold can experience a variety of about 25 different symptoms. To make matters even worse, many of the symptoms can often imitate other health issues, including the flu and the common cold. While illnesses such as the cold and the flu will eventually disappear, the symptoms associated with toxic mold poisoning will not. In many instances, the symptoms may even become worse.





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While one might assume that their physician would be able to detect mold poisoning, that is often not the case either. Unless your doctor knows you have been exposed to mold poisoning, they often are not able to diagnose the problem.

In considering whether you may have been exposed to mold poisoning there are many factors that must be carefully considered.

- For instance, do you live or work in a building that may have suffered damage from the weather?
- Does the structure where you live or work have stained ceilings?
- Do you find that you feel better once you leave either your home or work environment?

All of these are common questions that your physician would need to ask in order to determine whether you may have been exposed to toxic mold.

In addition, your doctor will need to find out about symptoms you may have experienced.

## Symptoms of Mold Poisoning

Some of the most common symptoms of mold poisoning can include:

- Blurred or distorted vision
- Chronic fatigue
- Chronic pain
- Confusion
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Coughing
- Depression
- Dry eyes
- Hair loss
- Hearing loss
- Hoarseness
- Itchy or watery eyes
- Loss of concentration
- Low body temperature
- High or low blood pressure
- Mouth sores
- Mucous membrane irritation
- Nail infections
- Nosebleeds
- Red eyes
- Respiratory infections





- Restless legs
- Shortness of breath
- Short term memory loss
- Sinus infections
- Sleeping for long periods of time
- Sudden abdominal pain
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Pain or tightness in the chest
- Tingling or burning sensations in the feet or hands
- Tooth decay
- Unusual migraines or headaches
- Muscle pain
- Cramps
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Sore throat
- Sensitivity to light
- Disorientation
- Dizziness
- Loss of balance
- Kidney problems
- Skin rash
- Dehydration
- Night sweats
- Heavy menstrual flow
- Prone to infections
- Panic attacks
- Tremors
- Attention deficit disorder
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Bruise easily
- Hives
- Infertility
- Miscarriage
- Fibromyalgia
- Multiple sclerosis
- Developmental delays in children
- Mood swings
- Vomiting
- Stomach ulcers
- Jaundice





Keep in mind that anyone of any age can become a victim of mold poisoning. Mold can be found in new buildings and structures as well as older structures. Sadly, many people never realize they are suffering from symptoms related to mold poisoning until several years later. Some people may experience one or two symptoms while others may experience an entire host of symptoms. You do not have to experience all of the symptoms to have been exposed to toxic mold.

If you feel as though you may be coming down with a cold or the flu and your symptoms never seem to go away regardless of what actions you take, it is possible that you could be suffering from toxic mold symptoms. Even though you may not have seen any visible mold in your home or workplace, that does not mean that it isn't there.

## Signs of Mold

There are often signs that can indicate the presence of mold, including:

- A musty or earthy smell that lingers throughout the structure. This smell is common in basements as well as in air ducts. Even the slightest musty smell can indicate there may be a fungus problem.
- Do you feel as though you are experiencing allergies for brief periods in certain areas of your home or workplace? If so, there may be a fungal problem.

If you have noticed either of the above problems, there is a chance you may have mold in your home or workplace. If so, it is important to check the humidity level. Mold is attracted to moisture and thrives from it. Therefore, it is imperative to be certain you do not have a high amount of moisture in your home. You should also check for any signs of possible leaks.

## Treating Mold

There is a common misconception that in order to get healthy and recover from mold poisoning, all you need to do is see your doctor. That is not the case. In order to completely recover, it is necessary to remove all possible traces of mold from the home. Whether or not you will be able to do this on your own or whether you will need to hire a professional to handle the matter for you will depend on the size of the problem.

If the fungus in question is less than 10 square feet, you should be able to remove the growth on your own. If it is larger than that or if you are uncertain of the size of the problem, it is advisable to hire a professional mold inspector. The inspector will be able to inspect your home and then identify areas where there may be fungal growth.

Along with making sure the mold has been permanently removed from your home, you will then need to take steps to treat yourself. It is important to see your doctor if you think you may have mold in your home. He or she can perform a series of blood tests to test you for exposure. From that point, your doctor will be able to recommend a treatment plan.





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Keep in mind that it is absolutely essential to ensure the mold has been thoroughly removed from your environment. When toxic funguses are left untreated they can result in serious health problems including depression, memory loss and more.

If you have mold in your home, it is absolutely essential that it be removed immediately and permanently. The symptoms associated with toxic mold are no laughing matter and cannot be ignored. Studies have indicated that as many as 50% of all homes may contain mold.

Remember that it really doesn't matter how conscientious you are about cleaning your home. Molds can live anywhere; regardless of how clean or dirty the environment may be, as long as there is moisture. Also, just because you do not see any mold does not mean it isn't there. Mold can be found on walls, floors, carpets, ceilings, furniture, fabrics, ductwork and insulation. You can even find mold in the crawl space of your home.

One of the worst locations for mold is inside the air ducts of your home. This is because the mold spores will circulate inside the system through the air and then settle into the dust in various locations. Whenever the central heat or air is turned on, the mold spores become distributed throughout the home.

## Mold Inspection

The best method for preventing a fungus problem is to make sure you know for certain whether mold is actually growing inside the central heating and air system. One way to do this is to hire a professional mold inspector. The inspector will be able to access the coil in the unit as well as the lining and blower. By taking a sample of the dust from the component's surface, he or she will then be able to determine whether there is any fungus growing inside the dust or not.

You should be aware that the cost for this type of inspection can vary. In some areas, the cost for a mold inspection can be as little as \$200, while in other areas it can cost as much as \$1,000 or possibly even more, depending on the complexity of the problem.

If it is determined that there is an active fungus growing in your central air system, the next step is to hire a mold remediation company. The mold remediation company will clean the entire central air and heating system. Dust and any funguses will be removed from the blower cabinet and the coil housing along with the interior surfaces of all ductwork. A HEPA vacuum is used for this process.

In the event the fungus problem was found in other areas of the home, you may need to consider staying somewhere else until all work removing the mold from your home has been completed. Remember that it is never safe to stay around active fungal spores. If the situation is mild enough you may be able to remove it on your own while using the proper protective equipment. If the problem is severe enough, it is important to call in a professional who is experienced at handling the removal of mold and for you to vacate the premises while the problem is remediated.





## CHAPTER 2

## Types of Mold

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There are many different types of mold that can grow in the home or work environment. Researchers now know of approximately 100,000 different species of mold. Among those different species there are approximately 150 different kinds of household mold. There can even be different sub-types of those types of mold.

The process of identifying mold can be time consuming and painstaking. Identifying a mold on an individual level requires extensive studies by a mold expert. As a result, it is impossible to identify the type of mold that may be growing in your home simply by looking at it or comparing it to photos of mold. This is because most molds have a very similar appearance. Even a mold expert may have difficulty in identifying mold simply based on appearance.

The only reliable way to determine for certain what type of mold you may be dealing with is to take a sample and send it into a qualified lab for testing. Remember that you should not attempt to try to identify the type of mold that may be present in your home on your own.

### Different Types of Mold

#### *Cladosporium*

This is a very common type of mold. It may have a green, grey, brown or black appearance. It is classified as a Hazard Class B or C, based on the specific species. This type of mold can grow in a variety of locations, such as wood, walls, insulation and dust.

#### *Aspergillus*

This is another common type of mold. It may have a grey, yellow, green, white, black or brown appearance. It is typically classified as a Hazard Class A or b. Some forms of this mold may result in an infection within persons who have weak immune systems. In other people it may only cause allergic reactions. This type of mold can grow on paper products, insulation, walls, soil, clothing and other locations.

#### *Penicillium*

This name may sound familiar because antibiotics that are used today were once discovered as a result of a species of this mold. Even so, this genus of mold can be hazardous. It may have a green, white or blue appearance. It is typically classified as a Hazard B or C. It can be found on foods, such as fruit and cheese as well as in insulation, on walls and other locations.





## ***Ulocladium***

This type of mold typically has a grey or black appearance. It is classified as either a Hazard Class B or C. It often grows in damp areas and can be found around windows, on walls, dusty areas and other locations.

## ***Acremonium***

This type of mold is frequently found on drywall/sheetrock and insulation. It may also be found in damp areas. It often has a grey, brown or white appearance. This species may be a Hazard Class A, B or C.

## ***Alternaria***

This type of mold may appear similar to Ulocladium under a microscope. It can have a grey or black appearance. It is typically classified as a Hazard Class B mold and can cause a variety of allergic reactions. It can be found on dusty areas, walls, damp areas, around windows, on plants, soil and other locations.

## ***Effluorescence***

It is important to note that in some cases what you might be seeing is actually effluorescence instead of mold. This is a deposit of white salts. It often appears on concrete in areas where water has penetrated and left salt deposits.

## ***Stachybotrys or Black Mold***

Of the many different types of mold, one of the most dangerous is black mold. Estimates indicate that approximately 25% of all homes have black mold growing somewhere. Regardless of where in the home, the mold may be growing, the microscopic spores can be released into the air and then travel throughout the home through the central air and heating system.

The most serious danger presented by these spores is that they deplete the myelin protecting coating on the body's nerves. As a result, the nerves are exposed and may begin functioning improperly or not even functioning at all.

Black mold is highly dangerous and toxic. It can cause a variety of different symptoms, affecting the entire body including the immune, gastrointestinal, respiratory and nervous systems, as well as the skin. When severe enough, the symptoms of black mold can even begin fatal. Black mold can be particularly dangerous to individuals with allergies to mold.

## ***Symptoms of Black Mold***

One of the most common symptoms of black mold is a choking sensation. A person may awaken in the middle of the night with this feeling. Other common symptoms associated with black mold include:

- Abdominal pain





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