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Health Risks Associated With Mold

What are molds?

Molds are fungi that can be found in virtually every environment both indoors and outdoors. Mold growth is encouraged by warm and humid conditions. Outdoors they can be found in shady, damp areas or places where leaves or other vegetation is decomposing. Indoors they can be found where humidity levels are high.

We do not have a true estimate of how many species of fungi exist but estimates range from tens of thousands to perhaps three hundred thousand or more. Molds grow best in warm, damp, and humid conditions, and spread and reproduce by making spores. Mold spores can survive harsh environmental conditions, such as dry conditions, that do not support normal mold growth.

How do people become infected with molds?

People become infected by inhaling mold spores that are in the environment. There is no person-to-person transmission. Just living next to a building in your neighborhood that is experiencing a mold problem should not cause you to become ill. Remember mold is everywhere.

How do molds affect people?

Most molds are harmless, but a few may cause illness in some people when the spores are inhaled. Persons who have a weakened immune system, are on long-term steroid therapy, or have other underlying conditions such as low white blood cell levels, lung cavities, asthma, or cystic fibrosis are at increased risk of developing signs and symptoms of infection.

Among persons who develop signs and symptoms of exposure to mold, these signs and symptoms will vary in severity depending on each individual's underlying health status.

Signs and symptoms to look for include:

- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Worsening of asthma
- Stuffy nose that is sometimes accompanied by drainage that may contain blood
- A dry cough or a cough that sometimes brings up blood or plugs of mucus
- Red itchy, burning, watery eyes
- Facial pain

- Headache
- Fever with or without chills
- Skin lesions
- Fatigue
- Chest or joint pain
- Unintentional weight loss

How long will it take for me to develop signs and symptoms after exposure to molds?

Not everyone will have a reaction to mold exposure. Currently, there is no precise estimate on how long it takes to develop signs and symptoms, and it also varies for each person. However, it is estimated to take between two (2) days to three (3) months experience to develop signs and symptoms after mold exposure.

For additional information, please visit the following websites:

1. Connecticut Department of Public Health. <https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Environmental-Health/Environmental-and-Occupational-Health-Assessment/Mold>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Mold. General Information <https://www.cdc.gov/mold/basics.htm>
3. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Alert. Preventing Occupational Respiratory Disease from Exposures Caused by Dampness in Office Buildings, Schools, and Other Nonindustrial Buildings. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2013-102/pdfs/2013-102.pdf?id=10.26616/NIOSH PUB2013102>
4. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Dealing with Mold & Mildew in Your Flood Damaged Home. https://www.fema.gov/pdf/rebuild/recover/fema_mold_brochure_english.pdf