

Mold and Your Home

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We've all had an experience like this at one time or another. You've noticed a dark stain near a window where water has leaked. Or maybe you've identified gray or white spots on your wood paneling in the basement, or even a pungent smell coming from "somewhere."

You suspect mold or mildew, but you're not sure what to look for.

Basically, molds are fungi that occur naturally in the environment. They are the most common form of fungus on earth and may grow in a variety of locations if the right environmental conditions exist.

Contributing factors to mold growth are a source of moisture, proper nutrients, the right temperature, and a surface to grow on.



Mold vs. Mildew

Both mold and mildew are types of fungi, but some pretty interesting differences exist between them. For example, mold typically grows on organic matter, whereas mildew often thrives on damp surfaces. In our common-day vernacular, mildew is surface household mold that we generally find on tiles, etc., but these deposits are often the same organisms you would find if you had a serious mold problem.

An easy way to distinguish the two is as follows: Mildew is a normal part of household maintenance and rarely problematic, but if it is left unaddressed it can become a mold problem.

Signs of a Mold Problem

Home inspections for many issues always begin with a thorough and detailed visual inspection. Inspecting for mold is the same. An inspection can be performed by a homeowner or a qualified professional. When conducting your inspection, focus your attention on specific areas where you suspect moisture exists or has existed. Many common areas for mold growth include garages, basements, attics, crawl spaces, and other areas where water damage or flooding may have occurred.

Stained or discolored areas on walls, ceilings, and floors or pungent and musty smells in themselves might indicate other areas of mold growth.

Mold and Health Problems

Many people have strong adverse health reactions to mold. Mold is considered to be linked to asthma attacks among asthmatics and, when inhaled by hypersensitive individuals, can cause allergic reactions and possibly neurological damage.

Those with immune system deficiencies are especially susceptible to health concerns caused by mold. Excessive mold exposure among this group may lead to ear, nose, throat, and eye irritation and potentially cause harm to the respiratory system.

As with any medical condition, always consult your physician with questions regarding your health and well being.

I've found Mold in my Home...Now What?

Corrective action and remediation steps are necessary to address existing mold conditions and restore the affected property to a "normal" condition. Remediation is necessary to prevent further property damage and further exposure.

Mold remediation expert Jason Earle (www.1800gotmold.com) recommends beginning by fixing the water leak and then removing materials that you can't clean, such as insulation, carpeting, and wallboard. To scrub the remaining surfaces, he recommends using a scrub brush and a solution of household cleaner and water. HEPA vacuums also should be used. During cleanup, be sure to reduce your contact by wearing gloves, goggles, and a respirator. When you are finished, the air can be cleaned with HEPA filters and tested microscopically to determine fungi levels in the air. These final steps probably will require a mold remediation professional.

Mold remediation isn't about killing mold; it's about removing it by fixing the water source.

Testing for Mold

If you think mold is present even though you have not found it, you may want to opt for accredited professional testing. Your local health department is a potential resource in this area.

Professional testing for mold usually includes an evaluation of the relative humidity in the home, moisture readings in suspected areas, swab testing, and tape lifts.

You also may want to consider specialized air testing to identify mold spores or microbiological volatile organic compounds (MVOCs).

Summary

Our homes present many challenges that, when left unattended, could lead to property damage, expensive repair bills, or even health concerns. Mold is one of those challenges that cannot be ignored.

Don't look the other way when mold is identified. Take corrective action and remove the water source and then remove the mold.

If the thought of mold remediation is too daunting, reach out to a professional and seek his or her expertise.

Sources: *New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) – Mold Advisory Bulletin Issue ADV-02-04*, http://www.diffen.com/difference/mildew_vs_mold, *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – Office of Air and Radiation – Indoor Environments Division – EPA 402-K-02-003, 1-800-GOT-MOLD?* (www.1800gotmold.com), *Jason Earle, Photo courtesy of 1-800-GOT-MOLD?*