For more information:

California Department of Health Services, Occupational Health Branch, Hazard Evaluation System & Information Service:
www.dhs.ca.gov/ohb

Environmental Protection Agency:
www.epa.gov/ebtpages/aindoorairpollution.html and
www.epa.gov/iaq/biologic.html

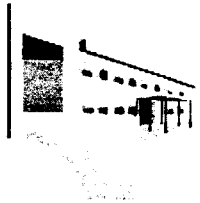
Occupational Safety and Health Administration:
www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/indoorairquality

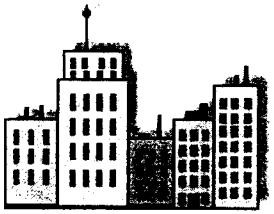
New York City Department of Health, Bureau of Environmental & Occupational Disease Epidemiology "Guidelines on Assessment and Remediation of Fungi in Indoor Air Environments":
www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/doh/html/epi/moldrpt1.html

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health:
http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/iaqpg.html

U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine
5158 Blackhawk Road
Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5403
410-436-3118/3144 or DSN 584-3118/3144

Molds at Home and Work





What is mold?

Molds are forms of fungi that are found naturally both indoors and outdoors. Moisture and humidity make mold overgrowth a problem in some buildings Molds produce spores, which are released in the air and can cause allergy symptoms in some people, although most people will not be affected by mold in their environment. Molds come in a variety of colors, including green, black, white, brown and orange. Mold sometimes appears fuzzy, but often appears in slimy streaks. There is often an earthy or mildew type of odor around mold.

What causes mold to grow inside?

Molds love moisture and need to have a food source. Good food sources for molds are cloth, wood, and wallboard. When there is moisture that is not dried promptly (for example, a burst pipe or leaking windows in rain storms), molds move in and reproduce quickly. In humid environments, keeping surfaces dry enough to prevent mold growth can be quite a challenge.

How do I get exposed to mold?

Molds produce spores, which are invisible and small enough to travel through the air and into your lungs. You can also be exposed to mold by skin contact.

How can molds affect my health?

The most common health problem from molds is allergy symptoms, including runny nose, scratchy throat, itchy eyes, sneezing, and in more severe cases, wheezing and coughing. Wheezing is a serious symptom that may mean asthma, and should be evaluated by a health care provider. Allergy symptoms from mold are more common in people who already have allergy problems. Some people exposed to mold report flu-like symptoms, dizziness and other non-allergic symptoms, but the cause of these symptoms is not known. Although molds can produce toxins ("mycotoxins") research so far has not shown a connection between these and non-allergic symptoms.

What can I do about molds in my house?

Any obvious water leaks or similar sources of moisture should be corrected promptly to prevent mold growth. Visible mold on hard surfaces such as tile or vinyl should be removed through surface cleaning with a detergent or soap solution. Mold on porous materials such as ceiling tile or wallboard requires replacement of the contaminated materials, and may need professional removal with appropriate worker protection. If you live in government housing, you should contact your facility manager for assistance.

What can I do about molds in my workplace?

Surface cleaning of hard surfaces should be carried out as above Visible mold in your work area should be reported to your supervisor, who will bring it to the attention of the industrial hygienist and facility manager. Mold in the work area should be removed, and causes of the growth, such as water leaks must be corrected to prevent further growth. Any obvious water leaks or similar sources of moisture should be corrected promptly to prevent mold growth.

What if I have symptoms I think are related to mold?

You should make note of the timing of the symptoms and see a health care provider for evaluation. If you have a medical treatment facility on site, you may be evaluated there. One benefit of this approach is that the on-site clinicians can work as a team with the industrial hygienist in evaluating your work area.