

## What is Mold?

Mold... there are so many questions that come to mind when acknowledging this simple and common word, and though the word may seem simple the role of mold is still quite complex. The three most frequently asked questions relating to mold are:

What is mold?

How does mold grow?

What are the potential health effects of mold?

### What is mold?

Mold is a tiny microscopic organism, which reproduces by releasing spores. Spores can be discovered everywhere in our surrounding environment, yet they are commonly found to be inactive. However, when the relative humidity exceeds 60% they will germinate and multiply. Presently, there are over 100,000 known species of molds in our environment. And although mold has become famous mostly for its negative aspects, mold also serves a positive purpose to our world. Mold helps decompose or break-down, organic matter, such as leaves, wood and other plant debris, and recycles the nutrients back into the environment. Mold produces enzymes to digest the organic materials. Without mold we would find ourselves and our living environments to be overwhelmed with dead plant matter. Yet, mold becomes a problem and a nuisance when it begins growing on and in valuable possessions, such as our homes.

### How does mold grow?

Mold grows by the process of producing reproductive cells called spores and distributing them into the environment. They can spread by means of air, water, or by insects. These spores perform as seeds do and have the ability to form new mold growth in ideal conditions. Mold spores travel through air, attaching to practically everything they come into contact with. For example, spores will affix themselves to people's skin, clothing, shoes, shopping bags and other personal belongings. Other ways spores can enter your home are through open doors and windows, through the heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems. Spores can also cross the threshold of your home through the fur of a pet. Mold requires a food source in order to grow. Mold will consume many materials including leaves, wood, insulation, wallboard, drywall, carpeting, clothing, paper, dirt, and many other substrates. In addition to a source of food, mold needs a source of moisture as well, for no less than 24 to 48 hours. Temperatures higher than 65 degrees amplify the possibility of mold growth. Mold spores usually thrive and reproduce in the areas of your home that have had flooding or where leakage has occurred. Mold also flourishes in areas around house plants, especially ones that are occasionally over-watered. In the short time span of 48 hours, a moist environment combined with high room-temperature and an organic food source can initiate extensive mold growth. Molds regularly emerge as circular spots, as a result of the outward growth of hyphae. As the mold spreads, it starts to appear more similar to a solid mat across an object. It is important to understand that mold does not only grow on the surface. Aside from growing outward, mold also grows down, into the substrate of an object. It is also imperative to comprehend that it is practically impossible to keep mold spores out of your home; however, regular home cleansing and maintenance can often prevent mold problems from occurring.

### What are the potential health effects of mold?

The health effects of mold are generally harmless to a healthy person who is not allergic to mold; yet, if an individual suffers from health conditions, or the mold is toxic, the effects of mold can be dangerous. However, toxic mold is less common in the results of a mold test. General illnesses resulting from mold exposure include the characteristic allergies exacerbation, allergy rhinitis, sinusitis, and asthma. Rare illnesses resulting from mold exposure include pneumonitis, and fungal infection. Most frequent health symptoms from mold exposure include chronic fatigue, headaches, memory loss, loss of concentration, difficulties in logical thinking and learning, runny nose, coughing, congestion, sore lungs/chest/throat, hives, itching of the nose, mouth, eyes, throat, or skin, redness of the sclera, skin rashes, skin redness, and sneezing/sneezing fits.

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