ABOUT MOLD

What are Molds?

Molds are simple, microscopic organisms, present virtually everywhere, indoors and outdoors. All but a few are harmless or beneficial. Molds, along with mushrooms and yeasts, are fungi and needed to break down dead material and recycle nutrients in the environment. For molds to grow and reproduce, they need to only a food source—any organic material, such as leaves, wood, paper, or dirt—and moisture. Because molds grow by digesting the organic material, they gradually destroy whatever they grow on. Sometimes, new molds grow on old mold colonies. Mold growth on surfaces can often be seen in the form of discoloration, frequently green, gray, brown, or black but also white and other colors. Molds release countless tiny, lightweight spores, which travel through the air.

How am I exposed to indoor molds?

Everyone is exposed to some mold on a daily basis without evident harm. It is common to find mold spores in the air inside homes, and most of the airborne spores found indoors come from outdoor sources. Mold spores primarily cause health problems when they are present in large numbers and people inhale many of them. This occurs primarily when there is active mold growth within home, office or school where people live or work. People can also be exposed to mold by touching contaminated materials and by eating contaminated foods.

Where does Mold grow?

Molds will grow and multiply whenever conditions are right—sufficient moisture is available and organic material is present. Be on the lookout for common sources of indoor moisture that may lead to mold problems:

- Flooding
- Leaky roofs
- Sprinkler spray
- Plumbing leaks
- Overflow from sinks or sewers
- Damp basement or crawl space
- Steam from shower or cooking
- Humidifiers
- Wet clothing drying indoors or clothes dryers exhausting indoors
- Discoloration of walls and ceilings can be indications of moisture problems.

Health Effects

Anyone with health problems they believe are due to molds should consult a medical professional.

Additional fact sheets on Mold and Health Effects are available from California Department of Health Services.

- Health Effects of Toxin-Producing Molds in California
- Stachybotrys chartarum (atra) – a mold that may be found in water-damaged homes
- Fungi and Indoor Air Quality
- Misinterpretation of Stachybotrys Serology

These documents are available from the Environmental Health Investigation Branch, (510) 622-4500, or on the web at: http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/

DETECTION OF MOLD

How can I tell if I have mold in my room?

You may suspect that you have mold if you see discolored patches or cottony or speckled growth on walls or furniture or if you smell an earthy or musty odor. Evidence of past or ongoing water damage should also trigger more thorough inspection. You may find mold growth underneath water-damaged surfaces or behind walls, floors or ceilings.
How can I prevent indoor mold problems in my room?

Here are some suggestions:

- Hang up wet towels
- Clean up small water spills
- Take out trash regularly
- Keep microfrige clean

Inspect your room regularly for indications and sources of indoor moisture and mold. Take steps to eliminate sources of water as quickly as possible. If a leak or flooding occurs, it is essential to act quickly.

- Stop the source of leak or flooding by contacting the appropriate person to notify Facilities staff.
- Remove excess water with mops or wet vacuum. (This will be completed by Building Services)
- Whenever possible, move wet items to a dry and well ventilated area or outside to expedite drying. Move rugs and pull up areas of wet carpet as soon as possible.
- Open closet and cabinet doors and move furniture away from walls to increase circulation.
- Do NOT turn up the heat or use heaters in confined areas, as higher temperatures increase the rate of mold growth.
- Bathrooms need to be clean on regular bases, so that there is not an increase in the rate of mold growth.
- Keep thermostats at a constant temperature.

Housing and Food Safety Office Procedures

Initial assessment is a three step process:

- Visual assessment will be performed
- If needed Facilities staff will be called to:
  - Clean A/C
  - Repair plumbing leaks
  - Clean and disinfect area
  - Train residents on proper cleaning techniques
- A moisture and Humidity test will be performed

If signs of high humidity or high moisture are encountered a more thorough assessment will be performed.

- An air quality test by the UT Environmental Health and Safety Office will be performed.

Air quality tests take up to 3 weeks for results. Labs need 7-10 day to let spores grow to determine the types and concentration of mold.
- A HEPA air purifier and/or dehumidifier will be provided for resident use while the air quality test is being evaluated.

Additional Information

1. www.epa.gov/iaq/
2. www.cal-iaq.org
3. http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mold/