

## Resources on Mold

Center for Disease Control (CDC)  
[www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/mold/moldfacts.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/mold/moldfacts.htm)

Children's Environmental health Network – [www.cehn.org](http://www.cehn.org)

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – [www.epa.gov/iaq/molds](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds)



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# Mold in Homes



are  
**Children**  
at  
**Risk**

Mold is in the news. Families have become increasingly concerned about indoor mold as they become aware that exposure to mold causes a variety of health effects. What are the real risks? This literature offers practical information about exposure to mold and children’s health. It does not claim to be a definitive statement as research on mold and health effects is ongoing and often controversial.



Everyone is exposed to some mold on a daily basis without evident harm. Mold spores primarily cause health problems when they are present in large numbers and people inhale many of them. For some people, a relatively small number of mold spores can trigger an allergic reaction or lead to other health problems. For other persons, symptoms may occur only when exposure levels are much higher. People can also be exposed to mold by touching contaminated materials and by eating moldy foods.

### Why are children especially at risk?

Their immune systems, which fight illness, are still developing. If children get sick, getting well may be harder.

For their size, children breathe more air than adults. When they breathe mold spores, they get a bigger dose per pound of body weight than adults.

Children, exploratory in nature, also tend to touch surfaces more frequently, increasing their exposure to spores on surfaces.

### How do molds affect people, including children?

For individuals sensitive to molds, allergic reactions, similar to common pollen allergies, are the most common health effects. Flu-like symptoms and skin rash may occur. Molds may also aggravate asthma. Most symptoms are temporary and eliminated when the mold problem is corrected.

### What you can do to control moisture in your home that could cause mold to grow?

It is impossible to get rid of all molds and mold spores indoors. Since mold spores will not grow if moisture is not present, the key to mold control is to solve moisture problems before they become mold problems. Inspect your house or apartment regularly for potential water problems and take the following actions to prevent mold growth:

- Repair water leaks promptly, and either dry out and clean or replace water-damaged materials. Materials that stay wet for more than 48 hours are likely to produce mold growth. This is especially true for carpets and other porous materials such as ceiling tiles.
- Increase airflow in problem areas – open closet doors and move furniture away from outside walls of basements. Ventilation is important in these spaces. Use appropriate insulation in exterior walls and roof to help prevent condensation from forming inside during cold weather.
- Open windows in the bathroom while showering or in the kitchen while cooking or use exhaust fans (vented to the outdoors) to reduce humidity. Vent clothes dryers to the outside. Store clothes and towels clean and dry do not let them stay wet in the laundry basket or washing machine.
- Maintain low indoor humidity, below 60% relative humidity, ideally 30 – 50%. During humid weather use air conditioners or dehumidifiers. Relative humidity can be measured with a moisture meter, a small instrument available at hardware stores.
- Inspect roof gutters and downspout to make sure roof water is directed away from the foundation. Grade soil on a downward pitch away from the house but avoid placing dirt so high that it comes in contact with the siding.

### Can mold be toxic?

Some molds produce toxic substances called mycotoxins. The health effects of breathing mycotoxins are not well understood and are currently under study, but at this time, have not been shown to cause health problems. The presence of mold in a building does not necessarily mean that mycotoxins are present or that they are present in large quantities.



You may have heard about so-called “toxic black molds” that can cause severe health problems. This may cause worry if you know that mold is growing in your home. The known health effects from exposure to *Stachybotrys chartarum*, a greenish-black mold commonly associated with heavy water damage, are similar to other common molds. There is inconclusive evidence to support

claims of serious illness, let alone deaths. See your doctor if you think mold is causing health problems for you or your family. Many professionals agree that health problems come more from the length of time you’ve been in contact with the mold and the amount of mold in your home than the type of mold.

No matter what kind of mold you have, you need to get rid of it and fix the moisture problems that made it grow. Most experts think it’s better to spend your time and money on cleaning up the problem than testing. General advice is, if mold growth covers less than 10 square feet, you can handle cleanup yourself. But you may need expert help, particularly if you’ve been through a flood or if there is extensive mold growth. In either situation, follow the government cleanup recommendations at [www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/mold\\_remediation.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/mold_remediation.html), or call Cornell Cooperative Extension’s Consumer HelpLine for specific information at 631-727-7850, ext. 374.