



Environmental Health & Safety
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What to Know About Mold and Moisture

How does mold get into a building? Most, if not all, mold found indoors comes from outdoor sources. It seems likely to grow and become a problem only where there is water damage, high humidity, or dampness. All molds need moisture to grow. Common sources of indoor moisture that can cause mold problems include flooding, roof and plumbing leaks, damp basement or crawl spaces, utility tunnels, air conditioning equipment or anywhere moist air condenses on cold surfaces.

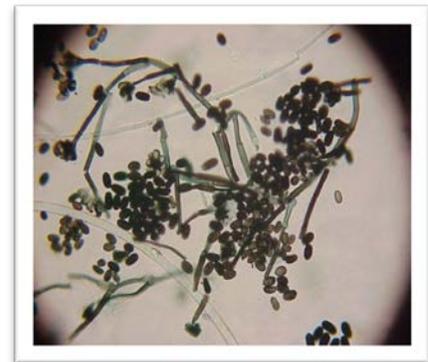
How can I prevent mold growth? Controlling excess moisture is the key to preventing and stopping indoor mold growth. Repair water leaks promptly. Dry out and clean or replace any water-damaged materials. Materials that stay wet longer than 48 hours may produce mold growth. Ventilate or use exhaust fans (to the outdoors) to remove moisture before it accumulates or condenses on other surfaces. To lower humidity, use air conditioners and dehumidifiers.

What is mold? Molds are forms of fungi found indoors and outdoors all year round. All of us are exposed to fungal spores daily in the air we breathe, both outside and inside. Outdoors, molds live in the soil, on plants and on dead or decaying matter. Another common term for mold is mildew. Mold growth is encouraged by warm and humid conditions, although it can grow during cold weather. There are many thousands of species of mold. They can be in any color, including white, orange, green, brown, or black. Most fungi, including molds, produce microscopic cells called "spores" that are spread easily through the air. Live spores act like seeds, forming new mold growths (colonies) with the right conditions.

Types of Mold: Although a common mold in the United States, *Stachybotrys chartarum* (atra) is unusual in homes. The most common indoor molds are *Cladosporium*, *Penicillium*, *Aspergillus*, and *Alternaria*. The CDC does not have precise information about how often *Stachybotrys chartarum* is found in buildings and homes (Source [CDC, Q&A Molds 2004](#)). While it is less common than other mold species, it is not rare.

There are about 15 different species that of *Stachybotrys* worldwide. The mold lives on moist and water logged wood and paper. In homes it can grow in wallpaper, thermal insulation, fiberboard, dry wall, and gypsum board. The mold does not like to grow on plastic, vinyl, or shower tiles. The mold is relatively slow growing and other rapidly growing fungi can displace it.

In building material *Stachybotrys* grows best when the humidity is above 55% and there are rapid temperature fluctuations. When wet the mold is as a slimy green-black often with white edges, but when dry it appears as black spots. If the mold takes over an area greater than several square feet often with extensive water damage or involves structural materials, a contractor familiar with mold clean-up will be needed.



Please contact EH&S for any additional assistance at (575) 646-3327 or ehs@nmsu.edu

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Why are we concerned about mold? Small amounts of mold growth in workplaces are not a major concern, but no mold should be permitted to grow and multiply indoors. When molds are present in large quantities, they may cause nuisance odors, and can damage building materials, finishes and furnishings.

Can mold be toxic? Some molds can produce toxic substances called mycotoxins. Airborne mycotoxins have not been shown to cause health problems to occupants in residential or commercial buildings.

How do molds affect people? Most people will have no reaction when exposed to molds. Allergic reactions, similar to common pollen or animal allergies, are the most common health effects for individuals sensitive to molds. Fungal infections from building-associated molds may occur in people with serious immune disease but this is very rare. Most symptoms are temporary and can be eliminated by correcting the excess water problem or leak. The symptoms that may seem to occur from mold exposure are often due to other causes such as bacterial or viral infections, or other allergies. Those with special health problems should consult Employee Health or their doctor if they are concerned about mold exposure.

What should I do if I see or smell mold in my office? The most important step in solving a mold problem is to identify and fix the source of moisture that caused the mold growth. For small mold problems, use detergent and water to wash mold off hard surfaces and dry completely. Porous or absorbent materials (such as ceiling tiles, wallboard and carpeting) that become moldy should be replaced. If you notice a musty odor, but do not see mold growth, mold may be growing behind water-damaged materials, such as walls, carpeting or wallpaper. Persons cleaning mold should wear gloves, eye protection and a N95 dust mask or respirator to protect against breathing airborne spores. If you have health concerns, you should consult Employee Health or your doctor.

What about testing? Testing for mold is expensive. In most cases, testing is not economical, practical or useful. In addition, there are no standards for "acceptable" levels of mold in buildings, so when testing is done, it is usually to compare the levels and types of mold spores found inside the office with those found outside the building. If you know you have a mold problem, it is more important to spend time solving the moisture problem causing the moldy conditions and finally utilizing resources to get rid of the mold. In severe instances, call EH&S to evaluate the extent of the mold contamination. For cleanup or remediation contact EH&S or Facilities & Services. It is important to correct large mold problems as soon as possible. Fix the source of the moisture problem, then clean the surfaces, and finally, dry the area completely.

For additional information about Mold, please visit the [Center for Disease Control Website](#).