

UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES

Facts About Mold

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What is mold and where is it found?

Mold (fungi) is present everywhere-indoors and outdoors. There are more than 100,000 species of mold with at least 1,000 species of mold are common in the U.S. Some of the most commonly found are species of Cladosporium, Pencillium, and Aspergillud. Mold is most likely to grow where there is water or dampness- such as in bathrooms and in basements.

How can mold affect your health?

Most types of mold that are routinely encountered are not hazardous to healthy individuals. However, too much exposure to mold may cause or worsen conditions such as asthma, hay fever, or other allergies. The most common symptoms of overexposure are cough, congestion, runny nose, eye irritation, and aggravation of asthma. Please note that many of these symptoms can also be caused by a number of other illnesses or environmental exposures. Depending on the amount of exposure and a person's individual vulnerability, more serious health effects-such as fevers and breathing problems- can occur but are unusual.

How can you be exposed to mold?

When moldy bacteria become damaged or disturbed, spores (reproductive bodies similar to seeds) can be released into the air. Exposure can occur if people inhale the spores, directly handle moldy materials, or accidentally ingest. Also, mold can sometimes produce chemicals called mycotoxins. Mycotoxins may cause illness in people who are sensitive to them, or if they are exposed to large amounts in the air. Large exposures are typically associated with certain occupations (e.g., agricultural work).

How does mold grow?

All molds need water to grow. Mold can grow almost anywhere there is water damage, high humidity, or dampness. Most often, molds are confined to areas near the source of water. Removing the source of moisture- such as through repairs of dehumidification- is critical to preventing mold growth.

What should I do if I suspect that I have symptoms due to mold?

If you have symptoms that you suspect may be caused by mold exposure, UHS recommends that you seek evaluation from your primary care provider, who is best suited to evaluate your overall medical history, assess your current symptoms, and determine an appropriate course of prevention and treatment. If UHS is your usual health care provider, we suggest that you call the tang Center at 642-2000, to schedule an appointment for evaluation.

**Information for this sheet was gathered from the New York City Department of Health.*