

What Is Mold?

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Molds are simple, microscopic organisms. They can be found everywhere, exist in every building, and proliferate in the great outdoors. Molds serve many useful purposes but can also damage property and cause health problems.

Mold spores are very tiny and lightweight, allowing them to travel through the air. The spores can lay dormant for years and then activate when the conditions are right. There are only two things that are required to activate mold spores so they begin to grow:

- **Moisture**
The moisture can come from any source including a broken pipe, flooding, or simply high humidity.
- **Food source.**
Leaves, wood, paper and even dirt are food sources for mold. Modern building materials are an excellent food sources.

When certain conditions are present, mold growth will be accelerated; temperatures between 68 and 82 degrees, lack of sunlight, and lack of air movement will all speed the growth of mold.

Damage Caused By Mold

High levels of mold can cause structural damage to a building. Mold can damage personal property and items in the vicinity of toxic mold often must be destroyed because the allergic and toxic effects can remain in dead spores.

While many varieties of mold are harmless, a few varieties emit poisonous mycotoxins which can cause a range of health problems when a person is exposed to them in high concentrations. Mycotoxins have been linked to respiratory ailments, asthma and fever-like conditions.

Recently, individuals have alleged that in severe cases toxic mold has caused bleeding lungs, memory loss and chronic fatigue syndrome. There are few published studies that have analyzed the extent of toxic mold's health effects and its role in the causation of these more serious health effects is a hotly contested issue.

Detecting Mold

A musty smell is a tell-tale sign; that smell means mold is growing. Previous water damage is another clue; check areas that were inundated with the water carefully. Visible mold growth is often found underneath materials where water has damaged surfaces, or behind walls. Unfortunately, mold may be multiplying long before you see signs of it.

Additional Resources

The best source of additional information on mold are government Web sites. The sites sponsored by the EPA, FEMA, and CDC all contain information on mold, the causes, warning signs, and recommended cleanup procedures. Here is an example:

<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/moldresources.html>