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Molds can be found almost anywhere. **They can grow on virtually any substance when moisture is present.** There are over 100,000 species of mold. Outdoors, many molds live in the soil and play a key role in the breakdown of leaves, wood, and other plant debris. Molds produce tiny spores to reproduce, just as plants produce seeds. Mold spores drift through the indoor and outdoor air continually. When mold spores land on a damp spot indoors, they may begin growing and digesting whatever they are growing on in order to survive. There are molds that can grow on wood, paper, carpet, and foods. Mold growths can often be seen in the form of discoloration, ranging from white to orange, and from green to brown and black. When excessive moisture or water accumulates indoors, mold growth will often occur, particularly if the moisture problem remains undiscovered or is not addressed properly. **There is no practical way to eliminate all molds and mold spores in the indoor environment; the way to control indoor mold growth is to control moisture.**

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

If you can see mold, or if there is an earthy or musty odor, you can assume you have a mold problem. Look for previous water damage. Visible mold growth is found underneath materials where water has damaged surfaces or behind walls. Look for discoloration. Testing is usually not necessary. It is expensive and not usually done by public health agencies. **All mold should be treated the same: remove it.**

What should you do if mold is present in your home or apartment?

Although any visible mold can be sampled by an environmental consultant and/or analyzed by a laboratory specializing in microbiology, these tests can also be very expensive. There is no simple or cheap way to sample the air in your home to find out what types of mold are present and whether they are airborne. Even if you have your home tested, it is difficult to say at what levels health effects would occur. **Therefore, it is more important to get rid of the mold rather than find out more about it.** The most effective way to treat mold is to correct the underlying water damage and clean the affected area.

The key to mold control is moisture control. If mold is a problem in your home, clean up the mold and get rid of excess water or moisture. Common indoor moisture sources include: flooding, condensation (caused by indoor humidity that is too high or surfaces that are too cold), movement of moisture through basement walls or slab, roof leaks, plumbing leaks, overflows from tubs, sinks or toilets, humidifier use, inadequate venting of kitchen and bathroom humidity, failure to vent clothes dryer exhaust outdoors, line drying indoors. Ventilation, air circulation, and dehumidification are all important in controlling high humidity that frequently causes mold growth.

How should mold be cleaned?

Mold should be cleaned as soon as it appears, if possible, within 24-48 hours. Wash mold off hard surfaces with a solution of bleach and water (1½ cups of bleach per gallon of water); make sure to ventilate the area (Do not add bleach with ammonia - toxic fumes could result). Let the bleach and water mixture sit for 15 minutes and then dry the area thoroughly. Absorbent materials (such as ceiling tiles & carpet) that become moldy may need replaced, as they can remain a source of mold growth. It is important that cleaned areas be thoroughly dried. Gloves and filter masks are recommended during clean-up. Dispose of any sponges or rags used to clean mold.

If the mold returns quickly or spreads, it may indicate an underlying problem such as a leak. Any underlying water problems must be fixed to successfully eliminate mold problems. If mold contamination is extensive, a professional abatement company may need to be consulted.

What can I save? What should I toss?

Substances that are porous and can trap molds, such as paper, rags, wallboard, and rotten wood should be decontaminated and thrown out. Harder materials such as glass, plastic or metal can be kept after they are cleaned and disinfected.

Should I be concerned about mold in my home?

Yes, if the contamination is extensive. Airborne mold spores in large numbers can cause allergic reactions, asthma episodes, infections, and other respiratory problems for people. Most types of mold that are routinely encountered are not hazardous to healthy individuals; however, exposure to high spore levels can cause or worsen existing conditions. Mold can cause structural damage to your home. Similarly, when wood goes through a period of wetting, then drying, it can eventually warp and cause walls to crack or become structurally weak.

“Black Mold”

Stachybotrys atra (also known as Stachybotrys chartarum) is a type of mold that has been associated with health effects in people. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) investigators believe that an association may exist between infant pulmonary hemorrhage and the indoor Stachybotrys atra. In the studied cases, the exposure to Stachybotrys came from highly contaminated dwellings where the infants were continually exposed over a long period of time.

Stachybotrys is black or green-black and has a slimy appearance. This mold grows primarily on materials such as wood or wood-based products, paper, or other cellulose products which have become and remain wet. It is not typically found in dry or simply humid locations, or on bread, shower tiles, plastic, vinyl, concrete, or ceramics.

Typically, indoor air levels of Stachybotrys atra are low; however, as with other types of mold, at high levels, health effects can occur. These include allergic rhinitis (cold-like symptoms), dermatitis (rashes), sinusitis, conjunctivitis, and aggravation of asthma. Some related symptoms are more general - such as inability to concentrate and fatigue. Usually, symptoms disappear after the contamination is removed.