

Moisture, Mold, and Indoor Air Quality

Molds are living organisms, called fungi, found virtually everywhere, including indoors. They are most commonly encountered at UK in areas that have had leaks, floods, or other water damage. Certain molds may cause or exacerbate allergic reactions, cause toxic effects, or cause infections. However, the mere presence of mold in the indoor environment does not mean that people will be exposed to harmful organisms or develop health problems.

There are no commonly accepted scientific standards or limits for human exposure to mold in the air. Thus, air monitoring is generally not recommended when a problem is first suspected. The presence of mold in water-damaged environments can usually be identified by inspection. In that event, controlling and eliminating mold growth is the first line of defense.

How can mold be controlled? In most instances, mold growth is caused by high moisture levels and can be eliminated by correcting the moisture problem. Sources of moisture include roof leaks, plumbing leaks, condensation, high relative humidity, and flooding. Given enough moisture, mold will thrive and multiply. Sources of moisture or leaks should be identified and corrected. Relative humidity should be maintained at levels below 60%.

Water damage or the presence of mold should be addressed immediately. Water- and mold-damaged materials should be dried and repaired; mold growth should be removed. Porous materials such as carpet or ceiling tiles that have become soaked with water should be dried completely within 24 to 48 hours. If this is not possible, then the materials may need to be removed and replaced. Non-porous materials such as glass or metal can be cleaned with detergent solution. Extensive, widespread mold growth may require professionally trained personnel to clean.

Persons with asthma, severe allergies, or chronic lung disease, people recovering from surgery, or those with immune suppression may be more susceptible to health problems associated with molds. These individuals may need to be moved from areas extensively contaminated by mold or areas being cleaned. Anyone with persistent health problems that appear to be related to mold should consult their physician.

For more information on moisture, mold, and indoor air quality, see our web page at www.uky.edu/FiscalAffairs/Environmental/ohs/mold.