

# Workplace Mold

## What is Mold?

Microorganisms that produce thousands of spores as part of their reproductive cycle. Mold colonies can be “wooly” or “slimy” growths and be any colour red, blue, brown, green, white, or black. They are found outdoors & indoors and there are over 100,000 species with 1,000 common in North America

## What about Toxic Mold?

The term “toxic mold” is not accurate. Certain molds are toxigenic. They produce toxins (mycotoxins) but the mold is not toxic. The Centre for Disease Control (CDC) advises that all molds should be treated the same in terms of health risk and removal. The presence of mold does not always mean that workers will have health problems. Inhalation of the mold, fragments of the mold or spores can cause health problems or make certain conditions worse.

### Common types of mold are:

- Stachybotrys chartarum
- Memnoniella species
- Aspergillus species
- Penicillium species
- Fusarium species
- Trichoderma species
- Cladosporium species
- Alternaria species

### Why does mold grow in buildings?

Moisture is the key factor. In buildings, moisture is present due to flooding, leaks in the roof or plumbing, sealed buildings that do not allow excess moisture to escape, sources such as cooking facilities, showers, etc. and excess humidity.

### What are the health affects?

Common symptoms of mold exposure include:

- runny nose or nasal congestion
- eye irritation
- cough or congestion
- aggravation of asthma
- fatigue
- headaches
- difficulty concentrating

### Does my workplace have mold?

If nurses are exhibiting symptoms of mold exposure then your employer should carry out a mold investigation. The goals of a mold investigation are to establish the cause, nature and extent of the fungal contamination, to assess the risk of adverse effects on the health of the workers and to eliminate or control the microbial contamination.

### Step #1 Workplace Inspection

The first step in looking for mold is a workplace inspection. Look for common signs of water damage (discolouration & staining) and standing water around sinks, tubs, dehumidifiers, air conditioners and refrigerators. Mold thrives in dark moist environments and on various materials such as ceiling tiles, drywall, plywood, carpets, underpadding, cardboard/paper, windowsills and ventilation systems.

Surface sampling should be done (sticky tape, scraping, material samples) by an individual trained in safe sampling. Air sampling can be done but existing techniques underestimate the true airborne concentrations due to spore viability and varying growth requirements and rates.

### How can a mold problem be fixed?

All sources of water such as plumbing leaks, leaking roofs and foundations and water seeping in around window frames must be eliminated. Ventilation systems and proper humidity levels need to be maintained.

All porous materials such as wallboard, baseboard, wallpaper, carpets etc. must be removed. This must be performed by trained individuals. Solid non-porous surfaces can be wiped down with bleach.

### What can I do?

If you and/or your co-workers are experiencing symptoms of mold exposure and/or you suspect there is mold in you workplace, Contact your local UNA OH&S representative. **Report your concerns to your supervisor and fill out a UNA OH&S form.**



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