



MOLD MENACE STILL LOOMS IN BUILDINGS

It's furry. It's thirsty. And it may well be lurking in your basement, causing allergies and asthma.
It's mold !

Mold is varied and ubiquitous. While many molds are our friends - without it, there would be no pinot noir penicillin - the stuff that grows in damp areas of buildings is not.

Bottom line: "It is not healthy to live or work or go to school in an environment that is grossly moldy," said University of Pennsylvania environmental physician and toxicologist Marilyn Howart.

Any building can have it - old or new, home or church.

Although the public frenzy - some would say hysteria - over "toxic mold" and "black mold" a decade ago has waned, mold is far from benign.

It is one of the most common allergens in the Mid-Atlantic, along with pollen, cat dander, and dust mites. So many people have a genetic predisposition to mold allergies. Also, allergies can develop, and worsen, with repeated exposure.

On the low end of the scale, someone who is allergic might get a runny nose, a sore throat, or a headache. But in someone who is asthmatic, mold sensitivity could trigger an attack. It could exacerbate other pulmonary conditions, and those with compromised immune systems are at risk for mold infections.

In recent years, studies have shown that infants who live in moldy homes are three times more likely to develop asthma by age 7.

In schools, where one in every 10 children has asthma, mold can lead to increased absenteeism. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says mold causes 13 million missed school days a year.

If your child is sensitive to it, and his or her school has a mold issue, "one plus one equals two," said Reynold Panettieri Jr., director of the asthma program at the University of Pennsylvania.

"That's going to create an environment where the kids aren't going to be at their best, and their learning is going to suffer," said Drexel University School of Public Health's Hernando Rafael Perez, who a decade ago chaired a state committee on mold.

Even so, public health officials have devised no exposure limits. "It's impossible to come up with standards," says

Perez. There are too many species of mold, and people's sensitivity varies.

In any building, although mold is the problem, water is the culprit. It seeps in, often unseen and unknown, but make the spores already there grow out of control.

Or it flows into the building in a big gusher of floodwater. If you don't dry everything out in 48 to 72 hours, "you're going to have a problem. After that point," said Tulsa's Shaughnessy, "it's an uphill battle. The mold has already in."

That happened to many Jersey Shore homes after Hurricane Sandy, prompting the state health department to launch a campaign urging people with sodden walls or rugs: "when in doubt throw it out."

"When water comes in," said Lane, "it doesn't evaporate as quickly."

Christina Schulingkamp, an air-quality expert in the EPA's Philadelphia office, said keeping humidity below 60 percent was key.

A dehumidifier can help - as long as you don't forget to empty the reservoir.

Some homeowners can treat small areas with bleach, but generally dousing a large area of porous material with stuff is akin to "putting a Band-Aid on heart surgery," said Frank Vodraska, a board member of the New Jersey Association of Licensed Professional Home Inspectors.

When his own Shore-area home in Toms River took in 15 inches of floodwater during Sandy, he paid a professional \$15,000 to gut and treat it.

Officials in Pennsylvania and New Jersey also do not regulate mold-remediation contractors stringently enough, experts say. So the area is ripe for unscrupulous contractors. "Do your homework," officials advise. Check references.

(By Sandy Bauers - Philadelphia Inquirer - 11/3/13)

Mold investigation and abatement work is one of RT's key practice areas. We have worked with Dr. Howarth and can attest that her advice to everyone that living in buildings with mold is unhealthy is "sage advice" all concerned. Call us if you have mold concerns which need to be evaluated.

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