

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Mold in the Residential Situation

1. Q: What are the common symptoms of mold exposure?

A: The usual health effects of mold are either irritation or allergic and include watery eyes, runny noses, headaches, congestion, and cough.

2. Q: I have mold in my shower, should I be concerned?

A: You don't need to be concerned about the health risk associated with small amounts of mold that you may find in your bathrooms. The average person, (who is not allergic to mold, is not asthmatic, and is not immune-compromised) develops immunity to these small amounts of mold. If, however, you get large amounts of mold growing in your home, such as that which can grow in a wet crawlspace, it is possible that the "average" person may develop symptoms.

3. Q: I smell a musty odor, do I have mold?

A: Possibly. You should look in the areas where the odors are and look for signs of water and mold. If you have had water leaks for more than a few days, you probably have mold growth. If you see mold, correct the problem (see #13). If you see or smell mold, you should clean it up.

4. Q: Can TCHD test the air for mold? Does TCHD recommend air sampling?

A: We generally do not recommend air sampling for mold, because of the difficulty and the potential for getting "false negatives". False negative results occur because of the nature of the generation of mold spores, which is what we are sampling for in the air. The mold organism casts off the mold spores in blooms, and we never know when it is going to happen. Once the spores are cast off into the air, they eventually settle out of the air. We don't know how long this takes; it depends on how much activity is occurring in the area, airflows, etc. We only sample the air for 5 minutes at the most, so there is a possibility of not collecting the mold spores when they are in the air.

However, TCHD does conduct air, bulk and swab sampling for mold. Oftentimes, clients request our services when they are involved in a lawsuit or workers compensation case, or want to know if the material they are seeing in their home is actually mold. Cost of this sampling is paid by client.

5. Q: How do we sample?

A: It depends on what the client is trying to determine. If they want to know the types and concentrations of fungi to which they are being exposed in their home, or if they want to know if they have elevated mold growth in their home, they should do air sampling.

If they want to know if a certain material that is discolored is actually mold, they should do bulk or swab sampling. Bulk sampling is preferable over swab sampling, because the sampler is more likely to collect all the fungi spores when doing bulk sampling.

6. Q: How much does it cost to sample?

A: Costs of a thorough air sampling evaluation average about \$600, but range from \$300 to \$1200.

7. Q: I really want to have mold sampling done but just can't afford a lot of money.

A: The minimum price for air sampling is \$332 for one interior and one exterior location, sampling one time per day.

8. Q: I have plastic down in the crawlspace covering the dirt. Should I leave it?

A: Plastic that does not have an airtight seal to the foundation walls provides a moisture barrier trapping moisture in the soil. This enhances mold growth, yet does not keep the spores from being dispersed into the air. If plastic is used it should maintain an airtight seal between the air in the crawlspace and the soil below. Also, to be effective, continuous ventilation is necessary.

9. Q: I see something in my home that I think is mold, how do I know?

A: A quick check homeowners can do if they see a fuzzy growth they think is mold (many times this is really a mineral deposit) is to place a sample in water and shake. If the white material dissolves, it probably is a mineral deposit. If it does not dissolve it MAY be mold. Tri-County can do bulk or swab sampling (for a cost), which identifies the genus of mold as well as the concentration of mold.

10. Q: How do I find a company to do mold sampling in my home or business?

A: Companies that do mold sampling are listed under "Industrial Hygiene" in the yellow pages or the CDPHE maintains a list on their website (www.cdphe.state.co.us). Search under "Indoor Air Consultants", and click on "Indoor Air Quality Resource List".

11. Q: Can you just come out to my home and document that I have mold without sampling?

A: Without sampling we can only document that there is "suspected mold visible" or "evidence of water damage".

12. Q: How do I clean up mold?

A: To clean up the mold, first you need to stop the water infiltration into the area. This is imperative; *mold will continue to grow as long as it remains wet*. After you stop the water infiltration, you should physically remove any large quantities of visible mold. Then you need to dry the area with fans, being careful to not distribute the mold spores to the occupied area of the home. Consequently, you may need to contain the contaminated area. Once it is dry, a detergent should be used to clean up the mold. You should not use anything to apply the detergent that will disturb the spores, such as a garden hose.

If you've got a large area to clean up (>10 ft²), you should consider hiring someone to do it, because the furnace vents should be sealed with plastic, as well as the doorways to the rest of the house. HEPA filter respirators should be worn, etc. Remediation companies are available on the CDPHE website (www.cdphe.state.co.us), search under "Indoor Air Consultants", and click on "Indoor Air Quality Resource List" (at the end of the list) or in the yellow pages under "Fire and Water Damage Restoration".

13. Q: I've cleaned up this mold as described in question 12 and it keeps coming back.

A: Anything densely porous (drywall, insulation, carpet padding) needs to be removed and replaced. The only way to clean up mold long term is to remove the moisture. These materials cannot be dried out thoroughly. Also, if you continue to have moisture leaks, you will continue to have mold.

14. Q: Can you recommend a company to clean up my mold and water damage?

A: Companies that do this type of remediation are listed under "Fire and Water Damage Restoration" in the yellow pages, or on the CDPHE website (www.cdphe.state.co.us), search under "Indoor Air Consultants", and click on "Indoor Air Quality Resource List" (They're at the end of the list.)

15. Q: Do you have any general information on mold (especially guidelines on cleanup) that you could mail or fax to me?

A: For general information on mold & water damage see the TCHD fact sheets entitled "Mold" & "Water Damage", or the EPA brochure, *Mold, Moisture and Your Home* (under links). The EPA brochure also covers health effects. If you are interested in how remediation should be done properly, obtain a copy of the New York City *Guidelines on the Assessment and Remediation of Fungi in Indoor Environments* (again, see links).

16. Q: Can you give me some websites to get more information on mold and water damage?

A: See Links for Mold