



Feature Column

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**Keeping Your Hometown Healthy
Mold**

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Mold In Your Indoor Environment

Molds are an everyday part of our environment. In Arkansas, mold growth is very common in buildings and homes partially due to our climate of short, mild winters and long, hot, humid summers. Mold spores are carried indoors by the wind or on clothing and shoes. Once inside, molds will grow anywhere moisture is present. Floods, leaking pipes, leaking windows, leaking roofs and inadequate dehumidification are all potential sources of moisture that can result in mold contamination of our homes and workplaces. Although there have been numerous references to “toxic molds” in the news media, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that it is not necessary to determine what type of mold you have in your home. All mold should be treated the same with respect to potential health risks and removal.

The first step should be the identification and elimination of the source of moisture. This may mean fixing the roof or plumbing, caulking the windows or installing a dehumidifier. After the repairs are completed and excess water is removed, prompt cleaning of walls and other solid surfaces with a diluted bleach solution (one part bleach to nine parts water) will prevent mold growth. Immediate removal of water from carpets and other porous objects such as draperies and upholstered furniture will prevent mold growth, as well.

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Mold exposure does not always present a health problem. Most people have no adverse health reactions to being in an environment that contains mold. However, there are persons who are sensitive to molds just as others might be allergic to ragweed pollen or animal dander. These persons may experience hay fever-like allergic symptoms when exposed to molds. They may also experience symptoms such as nasal stuffiness, eye irritation or wheezing. Certain individuals with chronic respiratory disease such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) may experience difficulty breathing. Individuals with compromised immune systems may be at increased risk for infections caused by molds. Persons with these conditions should consult their physicians for diagnosis and treatment.

Quick repairs and water removal are the keys to preventing mold growth. These remedies, coupled with thorough cleaning, should eliminate any mold and prevent its return.

The CDC makes the following recommendations to avoid mold contamination:

- Keep the humidity level in your home below 50 percent
- Use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier during humid months
- Be sure your home has adequate ventilation, including exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathrooms
- Use mold inhibitors that can be added to paints
- Do not carpet bathrooms
- Remove and replace flooded carpets

For additional information on mold and indoor air contaminants, call Shirley Louie, epidemiologist, at 501-661-2833 or contact your local county health unit.

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