

# Allergy Clinic, P.A.

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## MOLD ALLERGY

### WHAT ARE MOLDS?

Molds are microscopic fungi, which, unlike plants, are unable to produce their own food from sunlight and air. Molds are made up of clusters of filaments and live on plant or animal matter, which they decompose for their nourishment. With tens of thousands of different varieties, molds are among the most widespread living organisms. Many molds reproduce by releasing spores into the air, which then settle on organic matter and grow into new mold clusters. These airborne mold spores are far more numerous than pollen grains and, when inhaled, can produce allergic symptoms.

### WHERE ARE MOLDS FOUND?

Molds can be found in most environments and, unlike pollens, do not have a strictly limited season. Warmth and high humidity encourage mold growth so growth is most prevalent during the humid seasons of the year. Molds are found out-of-doors and in the home. Mold spores produced outside become widely dispersed through the air and can enter the home. Other molds grow in the home, especially in areas of high humidity such as showers and basements



### HOW DO I CONTROL MOLD GROWTH?

Mold flourishes in dark, damp places that are poorly ventilated and in areas where water pools. Moisture and warmth can accelerate the growth of dormant mildew spores on most surfaces. Once the area of mold growth has been identified a 10% bleach solution may be used to kill the mold spores. Modifications such as increased ventilation and proper drainage should be used to discourage mold growth.

Molds can accumulate in house dust from two sources: as outdoor spores that have entered the home or as mold growing within the home environment. Proper filtration can help prevent mold from entering living quarters. Air conditioners and vent openings are prime locations for trapping molds at point-of-entry. Vent or central furnace filters and room air cleaners are helpful in removing airborne spores. Units with heating elements to kill airborne mold spores can prevent the spread of mold. A tight-fitting facemask is important for preventing the inhalation of mold spores when doing yard work and basement cleaning projects

### HUMIDITY MODIFICATION

Mold thrives in high humidity; therefore, relative humidity should be maintained between 40 and 50%. If the outside air is less humid than the indoor air, an increase in air exchange can help reduce the indoor humidity. Air conditioning and dehumidifiers are important tools in reducing mold production. If you plan on using a humidifier in dry seasons, be sure to avoid over-humidification by monitoring with a gauge.

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# **REDUCING YOUR EXPOSURE TO MOLD**

## **THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE**

- Keep humidity low, around 40% if possible, but in no case over 50%.
- Very tightly insulated houses prevent the escape of moisture and thus encourage mold growth. Allow adequate ventilation.
- Use an air conditioner or dehumidifier in times of high humidity. To help trap airborne allergens, use a special air conditioner filter and/or a HEPA room air cleaner.
- Convection heat units can make mold spores non-viable and reduce the spread of mildew.
- Avoid over-humidification in the winter. Keep humidifier mold-free by cleaning with diluted bleach solution or white vinegar. Central humidifiers should be checked and cleaned frequently.
- Clean all visible mold from walls and ceilings.
- Add a mold inhibitor to paint before applying.
- Although indoor plants are not a major source of indoor mold spores, it is prudent to limit the number of houseplants.
- Mold is present on the bark of wood. If using a fireplace or woodburning stove, do not store any firewood inside.
- Avoid live Christmas trees, as mold could be present on branches and bark.

## **IN THE BEDROOM**

- Because they are damp and dark, mold tends to grow in closets. Dry all shoes and boots thoroughly before storing. Use a chemical moisture remover in closets and storage spaces.

## **IN THE BATHROOM**

- Use an exhaust fan or open windows to remove humidity after showering.
- Use a squeegee to remove excess water from the shower stall, tub and tiles.
- Wash shower curtain, bathroom tiles, shower stall, tub and toilet tank with mold-killing solutions.
- Do not carpet the bathroom.

## **IN THE KITCHEN**

- Use an exhaust fan to remove cooking vapors.
- Mold grows in refrigerators, particularly around door gaskets. Empty water pans below self-defrosting units frequently. Remove spoiling foods.
- Empty garbage containers frequently and keep clean to prevent the growth of mold.

## **IN THE LAUNDRY ROOM**

- Dry all clothing immediately after washing and vent the clothes dryer to the outdoors.
- Correct seepage and/or flooding problems and remove water-damaged carpets. Cover dirt floor with plastic vapor barrier.

## **OUTSIDE THE HOUSE**

- Have someone mow the lawn and rake leaves for you. Use a well-fitting facemask if the allergic individual cannot avoid cutting grass and raking leaves. Avoid exposure to soil, compost piles, sandboxes, hay, fertilizers and barns. Prune or cut trees and eliminate vines to prevent shading of the home.
- Correct drainage problems near the house as pooled water greatly increases mold formation.
- Avoid camping or walking in the woods where mold growth on rotted logs and other vegetation is high. Some mold spores are spread on dry and windy days and others at times of rainfall.

## **MISCELLANEOUS ENVIRONMENTS**

- Greenhouses, antique shops and saunas, sleeping bags, summer cottages and hotel rooms are sources of increased mold exposure. Automobile air conditioners may harbor mold.