**Mold Allergy**

Molds live everywhere. Disturbing a mold source can disperse mold spores into the air, triggering an allergic response in some people. This fact sheet describes mold allergy, how to manage an allergy to mold, and how to prevent mold growth in the home.

**What is mold?**

Mold is another term for fungus (mold and fungus are the same thing). The plural of fungus is fungi. When talking about more than one kind of mold, we can use the word fungi. Molds differ from plants in how they reproduce and grow. The seeds of fungi are called spores. They are spread by the wind outdoors and by air indoors. Some spores are released in dry, windy weather. Others are released with the fog or dew when humidity is high.

There are many kinds of mold. Some molds form colonies, which you can see with the unaided eye. Other types of molds are only visible when viewed under a microscope. Many molds grow on rotting logs and fallen leaves; in compost piles; or on grasses and grains. Unlike pollens, molds do not die with the first frost in the late fall or early winter. Instead, most outdoor molds become dormant during the winter. In the spring, they grow on plants killed by the cold. Indoors, mold grows wherever there is a source of moisture, particularly in the bathroom, kitchen, or basement.

Although there are many types of molds, only a few dozen are known to cause allergic reactions. These are the molds we test for in the skin allergy panel.

**Who gets mold allergy?**

It is common for people to develop an allergy to one or more types of mold if they, or other family members, have a history of allergic responses to things such as pollen or animal dander. Some people may become allergic only to mold or they also may have problems with other allergens such as dust mites, pollen, or certain foods.

 **Good to know . . .**If you have an allergy to mold, you likely will not be allergic to all types of mold. Mold spores have only limited similarities, and your body probably will only be sensitive to some of them.

**What are the symptoms of mold allergy?**

When mold spores are released into the environment, they can deposit on the inside lining of the nose, causing hay fever symptoms. The spores also can reach the lungs, triggering asthma symptoms in sensitive individuals. In rare cases, a serious illness called allergic bronchopulmonary aspergillosis develops.

In general, the symptoms of mold allergy are very similar to the symptoms of other allergies. If you have an allergy to mold, you may experience some of the following symptoms:

•            Sneezing

•            Runny or stuffy nose

•            Itching of the throat, or inside the ears

•             Hives

•            Swollen eyelids, itchy eyes

•            Cough, wheezing, or difficulty breathing

Some people with mold allergies experience seasonal symptoms due to outdoor molds. However, if you are allergic to molds found indoors, you may have symptoms year-round. Sometimes the allergic reaction to mold exposure is immediate. For some people, the reaction can be delayed.

**What is the treatment for the condition/situation?**

The best treatment for mold allergy is avoiding mold exposure and taking steps to reduce or eliminate mold spore growth wherever you can. Here are some suggestions.

**Avoid contact.**Keep away from areas known to harbor mold spores. Mold that grows on houseplants can cause an allergic reaction, but this is only likely to happen if the soil is disturbed.

**Reduce indoor humidity.**If indoor humidity is above 50 percent, the risk of mold growth rises steeply. Hygrometers can be used to measure humidity accurately. The goal is to keep humidity below 45 percent, and preferably at about 35 percent. Use an electric dehumidifier to remove moisture from the basement. Be sure to drain the dehumidifier regularly and clean the condensation coils and collection bucket.

**Use central air conditioning with a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter.**These filters help trap spores before they reach you. Air conditioning with a HEPA filter attached works better than electrostatic air- cleaning devices and much better than freestanding air cleaners. Devices that treat indoor air with heat, ions, or ozone are not recommended.

**Take medications properly.**Some people find relief of allergy symptoms by using medications. Once you have completed you skin allergy testing, you can talk with your provider about optimal treatment strategies.

**How can mold growth be controlled in the home?**

The more you are able to prevent the growth and distribution of mold spores, the more likely you are to reduce your exposure to mold. There are a number of things you can do to keep mold from developing into a problem in and around your home. Here are some suggestions.

•            Put an exhaust fan or open a window in the bathroom

•            Quickly repair any plumbing leaks.

•            Repair blocked drains and water seepage through basement walls.

•            Fix poorly vented clothes dryers.

•            Remove bathroom carpeting where moisture is a concern.

•            Clean garbage pails frequently.

•            Scour sinks and tubs at least monthly.

**Cleaning curtails mold spore growth!**Molds thrive on soap and other organic films that coat tiles and grout. For problem areas, use a commercial bleach solution like Tilex, which has been shown to kill molds and neutralize their allergens. It is not a good idea to mix your own solution as bleach can trigger an asthma attack.

•   Add fungicides to paint, primer, or wallpaper paste to slow fungus growth on treated areas. (This approach has little effect if excess moisture remains.)

•  Clean refrigerator door gaskets and drip pans.

•   Polyurethane and rubber foams seem especially prone to developing fungus growth. If bedding is made with these foams, it should be covered with plastic.

•   Get rid of old books, newspapers, clothing, or bedding—places where mold spores can thrive.

•   Promote groundwater drainage away from your house. Remove leaves and dead vegetation near the foundation and in the rain gutters. Completely shaded homes dry out slowly. Dense bushes and plant growth around the foundation often promote dampness. In the winter, condensation on cold walls encourages mold spore growth. Even thick insulation can be invaded if vapor barriers in exterior walls are not effective.

There are some foods that may be associated with mold allergies that trigger a heightened response. Here are some to be aware of:

* Cheese.
* Mushrooms.
* Vinegar and **foods** containing vinegar, such as salad dressing, catsup, and pickles.
* Sour cream, sour milk, and buttermilk.
* Meat or fish.
* Breads and other **food** made **with** yeast.
* Jarred jams and jellies.
* Sauerkraut.