

### **How should mold be cleaned?**

Mold should be cleaned as soon as it appears. Persons cleaning mold should be free of symptoms and allergies. Use a common household bleach and water mix (one part bleach to 10 parts water) to clean it. You can add a little dish soap to the bleach and water mix to cut any dirt and oil on the wall that can hold mold. *Do not add ammonia.* This can result in dangerous vapors.

Apply the bleach and water mix to the surface with a sponge, let it sit for 15 minutes, then thoroughly dry the surface. Dispose of any sponges or rags used to clean mold. If the mold returns quickly or spreads, it may indicate an underlying problem such as a leak. Any underlying water problems must be fixed to successfully eliminate mold problems. If mold contamination is extensive, a professional abatement company may need to be consulted to help reduce the problem.

### **Will my health or my child's health be affected and should we see a physician?**

If you believe you or your children have symptoms that you suspect are caused by exposure to mold, see a physician. Keep in mind that many symptoms associated with mold exposure may also be caused by many other illnesses. Tell your physician about the symptoms and about when, how, and

for how long you think you or your children were exposed.

### **Who can I call if I suspect I have a mold problem or if I want more information?**

For more information about the health effects of mold exposure and information on the safe removal of mold, please call the Bergen County Department of Health Services' Environmental Program, Right-To-Know/Industrial Hygiene Section at (201) 634-2785.

**Bergen County**  
**Department of Health Services**  
Environmental Program  
327 E. Ridgewood Avenue  
Paramus, NJ 07652-4895  
email: [healthdept@co.bergen.nj.us](mailto:healthdept@co.bergen.nj.us)

# Commonly Asked Questions About Mold



**Kathleen A. Donovan**  
**Bergen County Executive**

and the

**Board of Chosen Freeholders**  
John D. Mitchell, Chairman  
John A. Felice, Vice Chairman  
Maura DeNicola, John Driscoll, Jr  
David L. Ganz, Robert G. Hermansen  
Joan M. Voss

**Bergen County**  
**Department of Health Services**



[www.bergenhealth.org](http://www.bergenhealth.org)  
tel (201) 634-2780  
fax (201) 599-6270

### **What is mold and where is it found?**

Molds (fungi) are present everywhere indoors and outdoors. They serve an important, positive role by helping to break down organic matter. There are more than 100,000 species of mold. At least 1,000 species are common in the U.S. Some of the most common molds found are species of cladosporium, penicillium, and aspergillus. Mold is most likely to grow where there is water or dampness, such as bathrooms and basements.

### **How can molds affect your health?**

The most common types of mold are generally not hazardous to healthy individuals. However, infants, people with asthma, hay fever or other allergies, or those who have weakened immune systems are more likely to react to mold.

Common reactions to mold include runny nose, eye irritations, cough, congestion and aggravation of asthma. A small percentage of the population can develop more serious effects, such as fevers and breathing difficulties. In rare instances, some types of mold can cause more serious health problems.

### **How can you be exposed to mold?**

When moldy material becomes damaged or disturbed, spores (reproductive bodies similar to seeds) can be released into the air. Exposure can occur if people inhale the spores or directly handle mold-containing material and accidentally ingest it. Some

molds can produce chemicals called mycotoxins, which may cause illness in persons who are sensitive to them (for example, persons who are prone to allergies).

### **What is Stachybotrys chartarum?**

Stachybotrys chartarum (SC) (also known as Stachybotrys atra) is one mold that is associated with health effects in people. SC is a greenish-black mold that can grow on materials with a high cellulose content (such as drywall sheetrock, dropped ceiling tiles, and wood) that become chronically moist or water-damaged due to excessive humidity, water leaks, condensation or flooding. SC is a relatively uncommon mold. SC spores do not become easily airborne; therefore, contamination of indoor air by SC is unusual.

### **How can you tell if SC is present in your home?**

All mold needs water to grow. Mold can grow anywhere there is water damage, high humidity or dampness. Most often molds are confined to areas near the source of water. Removing the source of moisture, such as through repairs or dehumidification, is critical to preventing mold growth. Many molds are black in appearances but are not SC, for example, the black mold commonly found between bathroom tiles. SC can only be positively identified through microscopic exam or by specially trained professionals.

### **How can SC affect your health?**

Typically, indoor air levels of SC are low and therefore not generally hazardous to health. However, as with other molds, at higher levels health effects can occur. They include allergic rhinitis (cold-like symptoms) dermatitis (rashes), sinusitis, conjunctivitis, and other more general symptoms, such as an inability to concentrate and fatigue. Usually symptoms disappear after the contamination is removed.

### **What should you do if mold is present in your home or apartment?**

Although any visible mold can be tested by an environmental consultant and/or analyzed by a laboratory specializing in microbiology, these tests can be very expensive – from hundreds to thousands of dollars. There is no simple and cheap way to sample the air in your home to find out what types of mold are present and if they are airborne. As noted above, even if you had your home tested, it is difficult to say at what levels molds would cause health effects. Therefore, it is more important to get rid of the mold rather than find out more about it. The most effective way to treat mold is to correct underlying water damage and clean the affected area.