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# THE "INFO"-HALER



TAKE IN THE INFORMATION

An easy to understand, informative newsletter for our patients of all ages from the  
*Allergy & Asthma Associates of Michigan, P.C.*

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## MOLDS

Molds are tiny plants, even though they have no roots or stems or leaves or chlorophyll. They are unable to produce their own food from sunlight and air like most plants. Instead, they live on decomposing plant and animal matter. They reproduce by giving off spores which become airborne. The spores differ in size, shape, and color among species. Each spore that germinates can give rise to new mold growth which in turn can produce millions of spores. Mold spores are microscopic in size and easily carried by air currents. In some areas they even outnumber the pollens in the air. There are tens of thousands of different varieties of molds, but fortunately only a few dozen are significant sources of allergic reactions. Some molds release their spores in the daytime hours during dry, windy weather and other varieties favor night time hours and high humidity, fog, or dew. When sensitive people inhale mold spores, they develop signs of allergic rhinitis such as sneezing, runny nose, congestion, and itching of the eyes and nose. Since inhaled mold spores are so tiny, they often pass right through a person's nose and upper respiratory tract into their lungs, triggering asthma attacks with shortness of breath, wheezing, and increased mucus production.

Molds can exist both outside and inside the home. The most prevalent outdoor molds are alternaria and hormodendrum. Outdoor molds are present year round in all but the coldest climates. In the Midwest, outdoor molds are seasonal, peaking in the summer and fall and tapering off after the first frost. In general, the higher the humidity, the faster most molds grow, though some molds can grow at sub-freezing temperatures. Cold weather and snow do not kill outdoor molds, they merely render them dormant. After thawing, molds thrive once again on the vegetation that was killed by the winter cold.

Outdoor molds can be found in the soil, on plants, on rotting wood, underneath fallen leaves, on decaying vegetables, in grass clippings, in compost piles, in bales of hay, in thatch, in damp garages, in barns, in greenhouses, on nature trails, in grain sheds, and generally in most shady, moist areas. Millions of outdoor molds become airborne during lawn mowing, leaf raking, bailing hay, and plowing fields. The best way to prevent exposure to outdoor molds is to remain inside with the doors and windows closed on days when the mold count is elevated. If you must be outside for any length of time, wear a mask. Maintain proper drainage around your home and keep gutters free of blockage.

The most prevalent indoor molds are aspergillus and penicillium. Indoor molds are present year round. They rely on warmth and humidity to grow. They are readily identified by their brown, black, or reddish appearance. Some molds are fuzzy in texture while others are flat and smooth. Most give off a characteristic musty odor. Indoor molds are generally found on basement walls, window moldings, bathroom walls, fixtures, shower curtains, food storage areas, garbage containers, bedding, old books, old upholstery and carpeting, foam Christmas trees, laundry rooms, and in poorly maintained humidifiers, dehumidifiers, vaporizers, and air conditioners. In general, molds inhabit just about any place that is damp, warm, dark, and poorly ventilated.

The best way to prevent exposure to indoor molds is to maintain the household humidity at 35% to 50%, keep all doors and windows closed during mold season to prevent outdoor allergens from entering, repair all cracks or leaks in the basement foundation, wash window ledges and shower stalls with a fungicide at least every three months, use mold resistant paints and wallpapers, keep house plants to a minimum, change furnace filters often, clean air conditioners, humidifiers, dehumidifiers, and vaporizers regularly, maintain adequate ventilation in closets, attics, or

other dark spaces or keep a low wattage light bulb on at all times, dispose of all moldy or musty items in the home, and use a HEPA air cleaner to clean and filter the air as needed. Molds can be killed with fungicides such as chlorine bleach, X-14 spray on agent, Mildew Stop Spray, or Lysol.

In addition to outdoor and indoor mold problems, some highly sensitive people experience mold allergies with certain foods they eat. Though food allergies are far less common, they are troublesome for some people. Common foods containing molds are cheeses (especially aged), beer and wine, pickled foods, dried fruits, mushrooms, left-over bread, and foods containing yeast, or soy sauce, or vinegar. The best treatment for food allergies is avoidance.

Finally, if you have mold allergies, be cognizant of your surroundings at all times. Schools (especially with swimming pools), work environments (particularly without air conditioning), and favorite vacation spots (like cottages, beach resorts, or cabins in the woods) may all be excellent sources for mold growth. Keep medications available at all times, and plan ahead to prevent potential allergy problems.

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