

Michigan Environmental Health Association Fact Sheet

An Organization Of Professionals Dedicated To The Improvement Of Health Through The Management Of The Environment

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Black Mold - Stachybotrys

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Some people's houses have toxic black mold in them that can cause severe bleeding in the lungs, coughing up blood or nose bleeds. Below is information about this mold that you need to know.

What is it?

This toxic mold grows only on wood or paper products that has gotten wet and stayed wet for several days or more. This mold is usually dark brown or black in color. The mold produces a toxin (spore) that when released in the air can cause illness. You cannot see the toxin in the air because of the small size of the toxin.

Is it in my house?

This toxic mold does not grow on plastic, vinyl, concrete products, or ceramic tiles. You might have black mold on these surfaces, but it is not Stachybotrys. The black mold known as Stachybotrys grows only on cellulose (paper or wood products). The black mold Stachybotrys grows on water soaked wood, ceiling tiles, wall paneling, unpainted plaster board, cotton items, cardboard boxes, and stacks of newspapers. If any of these areas have been very wet, usually for a week or two, check for black mold. This mold usually takes a week or two to grow. The mold and the toxin may continue to grow and spread in the air after these areas dry up. The toxin released in the air can be spread through-out the house by the furnace or air conditioner fan. You may need to contact an independent testing company to have your home tested for the Stachybotrys mold. Contact your local county health department for names and phone numbers of companies that can test for this mold.

Can it harm my family?

Some people have an allergic reaction to the Stachybotrys mold. Allergic reactions can include watering of the eyes, coughing and skin irritation. The toxin of this mold can cause bleeding in the lungs or nose. This can be a real problem in infants under 6 months old. Some people exposed to the toxin for a long time report cold or flu like symptoms like a sore throat, headache, fatigue, and sluggishness. These toxins may also lower your immune system.

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How do I get rid of it?

If you have more than two square feet of mold growth you should contact a professional company that knows how to properly clean-up the problem. Contact your local health department for companies that are qualified to do this kind of work. Proper clean up may include removal or special cleaning of floors, walls, and ceilings. Additional work may be required if the mold is inside the walls, under the floor, or above the ceiling. If you are going to fix the mold problem yourself, the first step is to correct the water problem that caused the mold. This might be a roof leak, a sewer back up in the basement or crawl space, or a leak in a water line. Make sure you wear a dust mask and rubber gloves. Keep the windows open for good ventilation. Clean the mold from an exposed hard surface by using a detergent or commercial cleaner. Items that cannot be cleaned, like broken wet ceiling tiles or cardboard boxes should be thrown away.

General Recommendations:

- There is seldom any law requiring a building owner to test or correct for mold. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration does not regulate mold.
- Inspecting for mold is still mostly based upon a visual inspection.
- Testing for mold is fairly expensive and should be done by a trained professional. Self testing can be done wrong and these results could be misleading. A professional can do both the testing and interpret the results.
- Start with solving the water problem. Water leaks from pipes, roof leaks, un-vented bathrooms, or poor drainage around the building foundation are all possible sources of water.
- How much mold can you clean up? When should you hire a professional? The New York City Health Department at their web site <http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/doh/html/epi/moldrpt1.html> recommends that if the surface area is over 10 square feet that a professional be hired.
- Wear gloves and clothing that can be washed after the work is completed.
- Separate the work area from the rest of the house. Close doors to the rest of the house. Seal off air ducts. Limit people from going in and out of the area.
- Smooth surfaces like tile and wood can be cleaned. Rough surfaces like carpeting, drywall, and paper may need to be thrown away. The best way clean mold off smooth surfaces is to wash it off using a detergent. Cleaning rough surfaces may require a solution of bleach water.
- The cleaned area needs to dry completely before replacing carpeting and drywall.

For more information check out <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/index.html>