Dear Alice,

I was wondering how to tell if my children and I suffer from toxic mold. My kids always have green runny nose, headaches, raspy voice, and moodiness, among other things. I have talked to the doctor. She just says allergies, but of what, I don't know. Meds don't really help. I need to know how to find out and how to fix the problem. If you can help, it would really make me happy.

- Keisha

Dear Alice,

I would like to know more about black mold that is found in houses. I understand it causes flu-like symptoms and nose bleeds. I have these symptoms. Please send me information on this.

Dear Alice,

Where can I find information regarding mold in the home and how it affects the health of family members of various ages?

Answer

Mold is a fungus that grows in damp environments, and many common household materials, such as wood, actually aid its growth. It reproduces itself when spores are released into the air. Humans come into contact with these spores through the skin or by ingesting them. Effects of mold in the household can vary and are influenced by several factors, including the type of mold (not all molds are toxic), the metabolic by-product of the mold, and the type and length of exposure the person has had. Age also plays a role; children are much more susceptible to mold than are adults. While the most common health concern caused by mycotoxins ? poisonous substances produced by mold ? is allergic symptoms resembling hay fever, mold exposure can also lead to infections, irritations, and toxicities. Some common effects noticed by those sensitive to mold include:

- Respiratory problems ? wheezing, difficulty breathing
• Nasal and sinus congestion
• Burning, watery, reddened eyes; blurry vision; light sensitivity
• Dry, hacking cough
• Sore throat
• Nose and throat irritation
• Shortness of breath; lung disease
• Chronic fatigue
• Skin irritation
• Central nervous system problems (e.g., constant headaches, loss of memory, mood changes)
• Aches and pains
• Fever
• Headaches
• Diarrhea
• Immune suppression

There is heightened risk and sensitivity for people who have chronic respiratory disease or immune suppression disorders.

If you know your living environment has mold and you can usually smell and see it if you do? you can treat it with a simple chlorine bleach solution. Using 1 cup of bleach for each gallon of water, you should be able to scrub away the mold. While doing this, you may want to wear gloves, eye protection, and a carbon filter respirator for added protection. Scrubbing is an effective treatment for smaller patches of mold; extremely large areas of mold need to be treated professionally. Do not scrub dried mold, because this will release more toxin-carrying spores into the air.

Symptoms should disappear once the mold has been removed. If they persist, you need to see your health care provider. In Keisha's children's case, they need to be tested for specific allergies if their symptoms do not disappear.

What can you do to prevent the growth of mold in your home?

• Fix leaky or broken pipes right away.
• Check and repair the seals on windows and doors.
• Keep indoor humidity below 50 percent? use a dehumidifier or air conditioning during humid months.
• Add mold inhibitors to paint before using.
• Clean bathrooms with anti-mold products.
• Do not carpet moist indoor areas, such as basements and bathrooms.
• Remove and/or replace previously soaked carpets and upholstery.
• Maintain a clean and dry environment.
• Ensure adequate ventilation.

For more information, take a look at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's mold web site [2], or Toxic Mold News [3], which also has information on some of the recent litigation surrounding mold in housing.

Alice!
Category:
Related questions

Asthma and special diet? [7]
Asbestos in the ceiling: Am I in danger? [8]
Secondhand smoke, mainstream smoke, and side-stream smoke: Dangers and differences [9]
Desensitization for allergies (immunotherapy) [10]
Safe, non-toxic way to get rid of roaches? [11]
Bleach fumes burning my throat and lungs? What to do? [12]

Published date:
Feb 01, 2002
Last reviewed on:
Apr 09, 2015

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/toxic-mold-around-house#comment-0

Links