

COMMONWEALTH MEDICAL LABORATORIES, INC.

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Why test for molds in your home environment?

Molds have the potential to cause health problems. Some are irritants, others produce allergens and some produce potentially toxic substances called mycotoxins. Two molds that are known to produce potent toxins are *Stachybotrys atra* (chartarum) and *Aspergillus versicolor*. A first-line treatment for allergic responses is allergen avoidance. Allergic responses may be immediate or delayed and include symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, red eyes and skin rash. In their least offensive form, molds are responsible as an irritant to the eyes and respiratory system for many people. Identifying an indoor mold problem and initiating steps for remediation not only helps to reduce your exposure and improve your comfort level but it also helps to protect the investment in your home. Testing areas after clean-up can be helpful to determine if your remedial clean-up efforts were successful.

What is the minimum exposure level to mold spores for the general population?

Since the susceptibility of individuals varies, it is not currently possible to set a minimum exposure level. Susceptibility varies with age, general health and exposure levels. However, a reduction in the level of pollutant below an individual's threshold level will decrease or eliminate symptoms. Some experts have determined in independent studies that the action level is an indoor level of spores greater than 1,000 spores/m³.

What are some of the symptoms associated with exposure to mycotoxins?

Fatigue, short term memory loss, numbness, headaches, nosebleeds, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, abdominal pain, hair loss, tremors, nausea, skin rashes, anxiety and depression can all be associated with exposure to mycotoxins. While many studies have been conducted to determine the association between molds and various health conditions, there is still much more research needed to be done. In its least offensive form, however, molds are responsible for being an irritant to the eyes and respiratory system for many people.

If mold is not visible but I can smell a musty odor, where could it be hidden?

Inspect the areas of your home that are prone to collect moisture such as cold water pipes, the attic, basement, bathroom or kitchen areas. Check for water stains on drywall, paneling, wallpaper (including the backside), windowsills, ceiling tiles, underneath carpets, or any place water could have collected. If you experienced a flood in any area of your home, even though the visible amounts of water were removed, water may have remained underneath the flooring or inside the walls and insulation for a sufficient amount of time to cause mold to grow. Mold starts to grow in as little as 24-48 hours so it is important to clean and dry wet spots immediately.

What should I do if the mold tests that are performed in my home indicate that I have a mold problem?

Although there are not any state or federal limits regarding exposure to mold spores, you should clean the suspected area (wearing appropriate personal protective equipment is highly recommended) or contact an experienced environmental or remediation professional to correct the problem. Be sure to fix any leaks and take the appropriate measures to reduce excessive humidity to prevent future problems. Indoor humidity should be below 60%, even as low as 30%, if possible. A humidity gauge or meter available from your local hardware store can be used to monitor indoor humidity. If you don't correct the source of your problem, the mold will

reappear. If you are experiencing health problems, seek help from a health care professional who is experienced in treating mold-related illnesses.

What should I use to clean-up the mold?

The EPA recommends cleaning surface molds with water and a mild detergent, followed by a 10% bleach solution. Be sure to use the appropriate personal protective equipment (gloves, goggles or glasses and a facial respirator). If you are extremely susceptible to mold or the problem area is very large, it may be best to hire a professional. For additional information regarding mold clean-up, please refer to the EPA's publication *A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture and Your Home* or a booklet available from the Federal Emergency Management's Agency (FEMA), *Dealing with Mold & Mildew in Your Flood Damaged Home*.

What tests are available from Commonwealth Medical Laboratories?

CML offers both environmental testing for your home as well as biological (blood) testing to determine your sensitivity to molds and other allergens. A summary of our services is listed below or you can visit us online at www.allergytest.com for additional information about the types of services available from CML. CML has serviced medical professionals nationally since 1985 and is CLIA accredited. Aerobiology Laboratory, our partner in environmental testing, is accredited by the American Industrial Hygiene Association's (AIHA) EMLAP for Environmental Microbiology. This accreditation is specifically for labs identifying microorganisms commonly detected in air, fluids and bulk samples obtained from indoor air quality studies.

ENVIRONMENTAL TESTING: For visible patches of mold, the Mold Lift Tape kit will identify the mold, the QuickTox™ kit is a Do-It-Yourself kit that will determine if the mold is *Stachybotrys* or *Aspergillus niger* (two of the most prevalent toxic molds) and the AeroTrap™ Fungal Sampler will collect and identify the airborne mold spores whether the mold is visible or not. The AeroTrap Fungal sampling is only available in a limited number of areas. Dust allergen analyses for mold, dust mites, cockroach, cat dander, mouse, etc. are also available.

BIOLOGICAL TESTING: CML has one of the largest menus of allergens available for testing in the country, including allergy test panels for mold. We have contracted with over 500 patient centers across the country to collect specimens and forward them to us for testing. Contact us for additional information on the availability and associated costs of allergy panels or ask your doctor about a simple blood test that is available to detect allergy to molds and many other types of allergens. CML's menu of tests presently includes almost 1,000 different allergens.

OTHER RESOURCES:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/moldresources.html

American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA)
www.aiha.org

Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics (AOEC)
www.aoec.org

Asthma and Allergy Network/Mothers of Asthmatics (AAN-MA)
www.aanma.org

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
www.fema.gov/mit