MOLD…. Should you be concerned?

Mold has certainly made its way into people's homes as well as the headlines recently. Many people still don't fully understand the health hazards of fungal exposure. The term toxic mold is somewhat misleading as it exudes an idea that certain molds are toxic, when actually certain types of molds produce secondary metabolites that produce toxins. The correct term is mycotoxins. Airborne mycotoxins can definitely destroy one's health. Sometimes, people are unaware that they are breathing mold spores and mycotoxins until they are very sick. Certain people have a minor allergic reaction to the non-toxic mold, but once you leave the affected area they most likely recover with few serious side effects. However, if they have been exposed to the dangerous molds such as *Stachybotrys* or *Chaetomium*, they could suffer from a myriad of serious symptoms and illnesses such as chronic bronchitis, learning disabilities, mental deficiencies, heart problems, cancer, multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue, lupus, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple chemical sensitivity, bleeding lungs and much more.

As most know, many molds can cause allergens that can affect some of the population, but some molds can also cause toxins, which can affect *everyone,* depending on the length of exposure. Approximately 25 million Americans suffer from allergic reactions to molds yet most of them don't even realize that when they're sneezing and sniffling the cause could be from fungi. The molds that produce airborne toxins that can cause serious symptoms, such as breathing difficulties, memory and hearing loss, dizziness, flu-like symptoms, and acid reflux. Common ailments from toxigenic mold---including allergies (hypersensitivity after initial toxicity), and excessive bruising---usually can be treated and reduced after people leave their contaminated environment. Often medication, diet, and other treatment protocols are necessary. But other health problems may remain permanently, such as brain damage and weakened immune systems. Eyesight, memory, coordination/balance, and hearing are generally the most common residual effects that often do not improve after treatment in most cases.

Molds can be found wherever there is moisture, oxygen, and something to feed on. The worst place that molds can grow, however, is inside wall cavities and flooring of our homes, wherever there may be cellulose materials they can feed on, such as wood, gypsum, fiberboard, drywall, stucco, ceiling tiles, plasterboard and many other fibrous materials. This is very common if there has been a plumbing leak or an inadequate roof.

All molds require some form of moisture to grow however, like temperature, the amount of moisture varies for different species. It does not have to be a leak. . . Humidity or moisture content of the substrate can often be sufficient (relative humidity 50% start becoming problematic in many indoor cases). It can also spread very easily through any HVAC system.

Many people are either unaware, ignorant, or in denial about the severe health hazards involved with some types of indoor household molds. Molds come in thousands of different varieties, but a few who are some of the offenders that invade our homes. Alternaria and Cladosporium are the molds most commonly found both indoors

and outdoors throughout the United States. Aspergillus, Penicillium, Helminthosporium, Epicoccum, Fusarium, Mucor, Rhizopus, and Aureobasidium are also common. The most dangerous mold strains are: Chaetomium (pronounced Kay-toe-MEE-yum) and Stachybotrys chartarum (pronounced Stack-ee-BOT-ris Shar-TAR-um) as they have been proven to produce mycotoxins among others, meaning they can lead to autoimmune disease. Under certain growth and environmental conditions, both of these fungi release toxic, microscopic spores and several types of mycotoxins that can cause the worst symptoms which are usually irreversible such as neurological and immunological damage. The disturbing factor about airborne mycotoxins is that it is impossible to know how much damage they have caused to one's health until it is too late. Therefore, it is imperative to not knowingly expose oneself even for brief periods of time in any place that smells moldy or has an appearance of mold or mildew. If you suspect that the air quality in your home is being compromised by mold spores, you can have the air tested. It's worth it if it helps save your health.

Q: How can I tell if I have mold spores in my home or office?
A: If you see mold growth, water stains, or have had a water intrusion problem, it is a good idea to have a **Clean Air Inspection** performed to test the indoor air quality (IAQ) for an accurate representation of mold spores. Where there is no visible mold growth, but there is a musty or moldy odor, again, have the air inspected. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

Q: How does mold become a problem?
A: All mold needs for growth is food sources and appropriate climate. Oxygen-rich environments with either standing liquids or humidity over 70% are optimal for mold growth. Example: Loss of electricity do to a storm. Mold becomes a problem to property once a structure gets wet. This often occurs behind walls where water intrusion has occurred. If it does not dry out or dries out slowly, mold spores can germinate within 24 hrs and destroy anything it grows on. Mold becomes a problem to your health when it comes in contact with your skin, or is breathed into the lungs.

Q: Does it matter what kind of mold is found in my home?
A: Some molds will produce mycotoxins (poisonous toxins). Simply spraying a mildewcide or fungicide on mold will not remove or inactivate the mycotoxins that have already been produced. Not all molds produce mycotoxins all the time. It is important to note that mold spores do not have to be alive to be dangerous. Dead and dormant mold can be just as toxic. Tolerance to these mycotoxins again varies from person to person.

Q: What are the symptoms of exposure to mold?
A: Effects from exposure to toxic mold can result in any of the following symptoms:
• headaches • memory loss • problems focusing or concentrating • chronic fatigue • nose and throat irritation • persistent cold-like symptoms • burning, itching or watering eyes • dizziness • nausea • tremors • heart palpitations • shortness of breath (during mild exertion) • exhaustion after routine activity • serious swelling in legs, ankles, feet • serious swelling in torso or stomach • prolonged muscle cramps and joint pain • sensitivity to odors • cancer • women who are pregnant could experience multiple problems, even miscarriages.

Please Note: Bleach is not effective at eliminating mold.