

# Information About Mold Allergies



## What Causes MOLD ALLERGIES?



People with mold allergies have an immune system response when they're exposed to certain types of mold spores. Although there are many types of molds, only a few dozen cause allergic reactions. The most common allergy-causing molds include *Alternaria*, *Aspergillus*, *Cladosporium* and *Penicillium*.<sup>1</sup>

When mold spores are released into the air they can stick to the inside lining of the nose, causing **hay fever symptoms** (sneezing, runny nose, and/or itching nose, mouth, and lips). Spores can also reach the lungs triggering **asthma symptoms** (wheezing, shortness of breath or tight chest). In rare cases, a serious illness called allergic bronchopulmonary aspergillosis can develop.



## Mold Allergy DIAGNOSIS

If you think you could be allergic to mold, your allergist is here to help! They will ask you questions about your medical history, symptoms and triggers, and may suggest testing to confirm your allergy.

A **skin prick test** is the most common type of allergy testing. This test involves pricking your skin with a sterile device and then applying a small amount of allergen extract to your skin. Then you're monitored for swelling, redness, or other signs of a reaction. This reaction helps your allergist determine the severity of your mold allergy and can help them identify potential treatments to help relieve your symptoms. In some cases, a doctor may use a **blood test** to identify your mold allergy.

## Indoor MOLD FACTS

Indoor molds thrive in damp, humid environments. Below are a few common areas where you may find mold.

- Rooms with a musty or moldy smell
- Areas with poor circulation like basements, closets, summer homes/cabins, boat houses, etc
- Anywhere there has been flooding. Especially rugs, carpet pads, wood floors, baseboards, wallpaper, and paper backed wall boards.
- Areas that are commonly damp like bathrooms, kitchens, and basements
- Indoor plants and aquariums
- Stuffed furniture, pillows, mattresses, stuffed toys, wool carpets, stored bedding, and stored paper products (magazines, books, etc)
- Areas of dust/dirt accumulation in the house
- Mold counts can be very high while vacuuming

## Mold Allergy TREATMENT

Mold allergies share some similarities to pollen allergies in their symptoms and treatment. However, growth and spore dispersal of many molds are not seasonal like pollen. Most molds can grow both indoors and outdoors. This means symptoms can persist for long periods of time and/or reappear several times a year. Your allergist can recommend a treatment plan to best address your specific condition and symptoms. This may include mold prevention and avoidance techniques, over-the-counter medications, prescription medications, and/or allergy shots.

## Outdoor MOLD FACTS

Certain conditions or situations often result in high concentrations of outdoor mold spores.

- During periods of intermittent rain and 3-4 days after a rainstorm.
- In late summer and fall, dying/decomposing plants can create concentrations of mold spores
- Garden areas, especially compost piles
- Mowing the lawn or raking
- Home exterior walls and windows covered by or near growing plants or plant debris
- Agricultural areas like barns, silos, baled or stacked hay





## Tips on Indoor MOLD AVOIDANCE

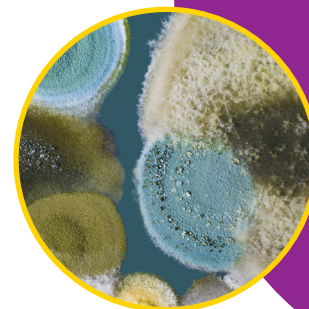
Avoidance is the best way to manage your mold spore allergy. Below are some strategies that may help minimize your indoor mold exposure.

- **Decrease Water Sources**
  - Repair plumbing leaks • Seal basement walls • Don't use a humidifier or swamp cooler • Remove houseplants & aquariums
- **Eliminate Mold Susceptible Materials**
  - Remove dust & dirt frequently with a vacuum or wet mop
  - Store linens & clothing in plastic storage bags • Get rid of old stuffed toys, furniture, natural fiber carpets & window treatments
  - Use vinyl mattress & pillow covers • Empty & clean your refrigerator drip pans, air conditioner condensation pans, & dehumidifier reservoirs frequently
  - Change furnace filters regularly
  - Remove houseplants & natural fiber containers (wicker baskets, hemp rope, etc) • Use synthetic textiles for home decor
- **Filter Indoor Air**

Use central air-conditioning with a HEPA filter
- **Use a Dehumidifier**

Mold thrives in environments with humidity above 50%. Use a dehumidifier to keep humidity below 45%, below 35% is better.<sup>2</sup>
- **Use Fungicides**

Unfortunately, there are no long-lasting fungicides safe for indoor use. Common household germicides (Lysol®, Tylex®, etc) can help kill indoor molds. Household bleach can be used at a 50% dilution or up to full strength in areas where it won't cause damage (basement walls, bathroom floors, etc) to decontaminate when mold appears. And paints with added mold retardants can help prevent mold growth.



## Tips on Outdoor MOLD AVOIDANCE



Below are some strategies that may help minimize your outdoor mold exposure.

- **Avoid**

Piles of leaves & plant debris, compost piles, raking, mowing lawns, and agricultural areas like barns, grain silos, & hay stacks.
- **Remove**

Plant debris around your home, vegetation growing on or too close to your home, any areas of standing water on your property.
- **Limit**

Time spent outdoors when mold counts are high and wear a mask during the times you have to be outdoors

