Facts about Mold

What is Mold?

Molds are fungi that are found in virtually every environment and can be detected year round indoors and outdoors. Mold growth is encouraged by warm and humid conditions. Outdoors, they can be found in shady, damp areas or places where leaves or other vegetation is decomposing. Indoors, they can be found where humidity levels are high, such as basements or showers.

How Do Molds Affect People?

Some people are sensitive to molds. For these people, exposure to molds can cause symptoms such as nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, wheezing, or skin irritation. Some people, such as those with serious allergies to molds, may have more severe reactions. Severe reactions may occur among workers exposed to large amounts of molds in occupational settings, such as farmers working around moldy hay. Severe reactions may include fever and shortness of breath. Some people with chronic lung illnesses, such as obstructive lung disease, may develop mold infections in their lungs.

Ways to Decrease Mold Exposure

Mold growth within an occupied building is indicative of a water problem. The cause of the water problem must be investigated and resolved to prevent remediating the same site multiple times. Likewise, when water is introduced into the indoor environment from such sources as a pipe leak, roof leak or flood, the affected area must be dried as soon as possible (within 48 hours) to avoid the promotion of mold growth. If porous surfaces or fabric cannot be adequately dried within 48 hours of water damage, The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) recommends that the affected materials be discarded.

Once the source of the water problem is understood and eliminated, several methods for remediating visible mold growth are possible. Each individual situation will dictate which method is most appropriate. The Guidance for Remediating Building Materials with Mold Growth Caused by Clean Water (Mold Policy) details specific measures for Facilities Operations and Services to follow to eliminate mold from University buildings.

Sampling for Mold?

Generally, it is not necessary to identify the species of mold growing in a residence, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) does not recommend routine sampling for molds. There are currently no standards for judging what is and what is not an acceptable or tolerable quantity of mold. Current evidence indicates that allergic reaction is the complaint most often associated with mold exposure. Since the susceptibility of individuals can vary greatly, either because of the amount or type of mold, sampling and culturing are not reliable in determining health risk. No matter what type of mold is present, it should be removed and the water source controlled.

The following links provide more information on mold. If you have questions or have a mold concern, contact REHS at 445-2550.

CDC mold information
http://www.cdc.gov/mold/default.htm

NJ DOHSS Mold information
http://www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/tsrp