



COMMON TYPES OF MOLD

Aspergillus

Aspergillus is a common group of about 200 molds that are found in a variety of environments. Although their natural home is in agricultural areas—grain silos, hay, compost, etc.—poorly maintained air conditioning units and flooded homes provide a suitable place for them to multiply. Certain varieties of *Aspergillus* can produce mycotoxins that harm human health, usually when contaminated food is ingested. This mold genus is also responsible for aspergillosis, a group of respiratory diseases that typically affects those with suppressed immune systems.

Aspergillus flavus

This species of *Aspergillus* is often found on moldy corn and peanuts. The principal danger it poses is the production of aflatoxin, which is harmful when ingested and is even used in the production of biological weapons. *A. flavus* can also trigger allergies.

Aspergillus fumigatus

A common mold in compost piles, *A. fumigatus* is known to cause invasive aspergillosis, a serious form of the disease that primarily affects immune-deficient individuals. In fact, *A. fumigatus* causes more infections than any other type of mold.

Aspergillus niger

A. niger is a common mold of the soil and air that can cause aspergillosis and ear infections but is likely to be harmful only if present in large amounts. It typically has a musty smell. Because of its color, it can be confused with *Stachybotrys*, the black mold with a reputation for causing illness.

Aspergillus ochraceus

A. ochraceus produces ochratoxin, which is often a by-product of poor food storage and can cause damage to the kidneys or immune system if ingested. Ochratoxin is also a potential carcinogen.

Aspergillus sydowii

This species only occasionally causes illness.

Aspergillus versicolor

A. versicolor is found naturally in hay, cotton, soil, and dairy products, but when found indoors, it usually indicates excessive moisture in a building. It can aggravate allergies when inhaled. *A. versicolor* can also produce mycotoxins that are harmful when ingested.

Chaetomium

Chaetomium molds, particularly *C. globosa*, are frequently found indoors where there is water damage to wallboard or wood products. *Chaetomium*'s large black spores may be confused with

Stachybotrys (“black mold”). However, like *Stachybotrys*, the spores are too heavy to remain airborne very long after they’re disturbed. *Chaetomium* can produce mycotoxins, so precautions must be taken in heavily infested areas.

Cladosporium

An extremely common airborne fungus, *Cladosporium* is often found in moist areas of the home. It can aggravate allergies and asthma but does not generally pose serious health risks to humans.

Fusarium

Fusarium is well-known for wilting and rotting plants in the garden; indoors, it sometimes results from using a humidifier. *Fusarium* can pose a risk to immunodeficient individuals.

Histoplasma

This fungus, typically found in the feces of birds and bats, can cause serious respiratory disease if inhaled.

Penicillium

Extremely common and fast-growing, *Penicillium* species can be found on every surface in the home—even in the dust that gathers there. It rarely causes human disease, although it can contribute to the production of ochratoxin (see *Aspergillus ochraceus*) and other mycotoxins.

Rusts

Rusts grow on living plants only, not on surfaces in the home, so if rusts are present the source should be easy to pinpoint.

Smuts

These are commonly found on plants (corn, for example), but can grow inside the home during certain phases of their life cycle. Smuts can provoke allergies and asthma.

Stachybotrys

Stachybotrys is the fungus commonly referred to as “toxic mold” or “black mold.” This is somewhat misleading; although *Stachybotrys* can produce toxins and is frequently black in color, neither is a distinguishing characteristic among molds. *Stachybotrys* is not rare, but it is found less often than other mold varieties. It typically grows on water-damaged surfaces in the home, and chronic exposure to toxins it produces may aggravate a number of health conditions.
