

Loss Control Insights

BEWARE OF MOLD

Mold. It grows on bathroom walls, it makes basements smell bad, and it ruins perfectly good loaves of bread. And if you're allergic to it, there's a good chance that mold will add to your misery.

The spores from common molds function much like the pollen from ragweed. If you inhale the spores, you could get a case of allergic rhinitis, otherwise known as hay fever -- an unpleasant combination of runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes, itching, congestion and coughing. And if you have asthma, the spores may trigger attacks.

What is mold, and where does it grow?



"It's not wallpaper Maury. It's MOLD!"

Mold is a type of fungus, a diverse kingdom that also includes mushrooms and yeasts. It thrives in warm, moist environments. The air can be full of it in warm summer months, often causing seasonal cases of hay fever.

Molds can live indoors, too. They've even been found in subfreezing temperatures: The only thing they need is oxygen, something to feed on, and moisture. A damp basement is the classic hotspot. Mold can also thrive on carpets in other moist places, such as basements, closets, and bathrooms. Other potential moldy places include tubs, shower stalls, air conditioners, humidifiers, garbage cans, mattresses, and upholstered furniture.

How do I know if I have a mold allergy?

Your doctor can give you a test to see if you're sensitive to mold, but the test isn't exactly foolproof. For one thing, doctors don't have samples for every common type of mold. (Molds can be surprisingly hard to grow in a lab). In most cases, however, you can find out with reasonable certainty if you have anything to fear from mold.

How are mold allergies treated?

The best treatment for mold allergies is avoiding mold in the first place. But if you live in a place where mold is unavoidable, your doctor can offer additional help. You may need an antihistamine medication to control your symptoms.

What can I do to get rid of mold?

Even if you aren't sensitive to mold, you don't want it to take over your house. Not only is it unattractive, but it can start to smell if left unchecked. If you happen to see a patch of mold growing in your bathroom or anywhere else in your house, you can quickly kill it with a dilute bleach solution or any other product that is specifically intended to treat mold or mildew.

There are also extra steps you can take to keep mold under control. Cut down moisture in the bathroom by turning on an exhaust fan and opening a window after a shower.

To prevent mold from taking hold, your kitchen and bathroom should be well ventilated. If possible, get rid of carpets in your basement or bathrooms. If a carpet or upholstery gets soaked, have it removed or replaced immediately.