



TYPES OF FUNGI

Classified by Health Characteristics

Mold essentially falls into one of three categories as far as health is concerned: **allergen**, **pathogen** or **toxin**

ALLERGENIC

Allergenic molds cause people to have allergy-like symptoms such as sneezing, watery or itchy eyes, itchy skin, etc. Allergenic molds can affect a large part of the population if counts are concentrated in indoor air. Common allergens include *Cladosporium*, *Epicoccum* and *Myxomycete*. Some people, especially those who are sensitized to mold allergens, are very uncomfortable being in an environment where allergens are present.

PATHOGENIC

Pathogenic molds behave like bacteria in that they actively attempt to invade another organism for the purpose of taking over the organism to some degree. Some pathogenic molds, such as *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium*, can cause severe health issues in the respiratory and digestive tracts. *Aspergillus* mold causes a serious and incurable lung disease called aspergillosis, while *Penicillium* causes Organic Dust Toxic Syndrome (ODTS). Airborne levels of pathogenic molds should be monitored closely in a medical environment.

TOXIGENIC

Toxigenic molds have been the subject of much media attention in the last several years, largely due to settlements of over \$1 million awarded at trial due to deaths attributed to toxic mold exposure in the home or workplace. There is no doubt that the toxins found in certain molds are serious; in fact, five fungal types classified as toxic molds (*Stachybotrys*, *Chaetomium*, *Fusarium*, *Trichoderma* and *Memnoniella*) are labeled as 'zero-tolerance' in an occupied indoor environment by the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE).

Toxic molds do not attack an organism – instead, the toxin in the fungal spore is absorbed into the bloodstream where it can affect basic bodily functions including cell replication and the nervous system. For this reason, toxic molds should always be removed from the indoor environment.

AIRBORNE MOLD LEVELS

Currently, no federal guidelines exist for mold as do for lead, asbestos, and other environmental hazards. The main reason is that experts disagree on how much mold is considered dangerous as there are many variables in how mold affects human health.

In making recommendations to its clients, ESG references guidelines established by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, the American Industrial Hygiene Association, and the American Society of Safety Engineers. These guidelines are contained in the document 'Guidelines for Mold Exposure' available from ESG.

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