

## MTA Environmental Health and Safety Module on Mold

This module focuses on some facts about **mold**; what school staff can do to identify and address mold problems and additional resources and information.

Information in this module can be presented in a 10-minute meeting. On the back are *Quick Facts and Action Steps* that an **Association Rep** can present at a school faculty meeting in about 3 minutes. Resources are provided in this module to supply additional information and strategic advice for Association Reps to use.

Mold grows where there are nutrients and moisture. When porous materials, such as ceiling tiles, carpeting, gypsum board, paper, or upholstered furniture get wet, they provide the necessary combination of food and moisture for mold to grow. When excessive moisture accumulates in buildings or on building materials, mold growth will often occur, particularly if the moisture problem remains undiscovered or unaddressed. It is impossible to eliminate all mold and mold spores in the indoor environment. However, mold growth can be controlled indoors by controlling moisture indoors.

All types of molds have the potential to cause health effects. Exposure to molds can produce allergens that can trigger allergic reactions such as rhinitis, dermatitis or skin rashes, asthma attacks in people allergic to mold, and other immunologic effects. Others are known to produce potent toxins and/or irritants. Potential health concerns are an important reason to prevent mold growth and to remediate/clean up any existing indoor mold growth.

### Tips for addressing mold problems:

- **The key to mold control is moisture control** – water-damaged areas and items must be dried within 24 to 48 hours to prevent mold growth.
- Report leaky plumbing, places where there is condensation, wet spots and leaks in the building envelope as soon as possible. Document all problems and actions taken by you and others.
- Wet porous materials such as school supplies, books, stuffed animals, carpets, upholstered furniture, wallboard (that isn't swelling), window drapes, wood surfaces must be dried, vacuumed, and cleaned with mild detergent within 24 to 48 hours to prevent mold growth. Otherwise, these materials should be discarded. Non-valuable books and papers, ceiling tiles, fiberglass and cellulose insulation should be discarded if wet.
- Hard non-porous surfaces can be remediated to remove mold.
- The school needs a plan to replace teachers' materials that are damaged (both school-owned and personal).
- A mold remediation plan should be communicated to everyone for small and large mold remediation plans that includes: credentials of the personnel doing the remediation, steps to prevent mold spores from being dispersed throughout the air, and methods for safely discarding, drying and cleaning materials and areas. It might also include consultation with a health professional.
- Do not touch or clean moldy areas or materials because you may spread the mold spores and there are others in the school system who are responsible for cleaning.

- If you suspect materials are contaminated with sewage, chemical or biological pollutants, then an experienced professional should be consulted. Do not use fans for drying before determining that the leaking water is clean or sanitary.
- Places where there may be a hidden mold problem are: the back side of dry wall, wallpaper, or paneling, the top of ceiling tiles, the underside of carpets and pads, etc. Possible locations of hidden mold can include pipe chases and utility tunnels (with leaking or condensing pipes), walls behind furniture (where condensation forms), condensate drain pans inside air handling units, porous thermal or acoustic liners inside ductwork, or roof materials above ceiling tiles.
- Sampling for mold, if mold growth is visible, is unnecessary in most cases. In specific instances, such as when litigation is involved, the source(s) of the mold contamination is unclear, or health concerns are a problem, you may consider sampling as part of your site evaluation. Sampling is often done after remediation is completed.
- Find out if your school is following mold remediation guidelines recommended in the resource section of this module. (EPA and New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene)
- Use a common complaint form to document leaks, moisture problems, moldy or musty odors or visible mold. Keep a record for the Union to track responsiveness to this issue.
- Ask if other teachers are having unusual or persistent health problems or conduct a short “symptom” survey. See MTA EHS website for sample survey.

### **Quick Facts and Action Steps for Mold (3-minute meeting)**

***Facts:***

- ✓ Exposure to molds can produce allergens that can trigger allergic reactions such as rhinitis, dermatitis or skin rashes, asthma attacks in people allergic to mold, and other immunologic effects.
- ✓ Water damaged areas and items must be dried within 24 - 48 hours to prevent mold growth.
- ✓ Sampling for mold, if mold growth is visible, is unnecessary in most cases. Most experts will agree that if there are signs of moisture and/ or visible mold it should be addressed immediately.

***Actions:***

- ✓ Report leaky plumbing, places where there is condensation, wet spots and leaks in the building envelope as soon as possible. Document the problem and actions taken.
- ✓ Do not clean up mold yourself; this should be done by trained personnel.

***If you have any other questions or concerns please contact your Association Rep.***

### **Additional Resources:**

- Go to the MTA Environmental Health and Safety Committee website at <http://www.massteacher.org/ehs>.
- Read the user friendly guide: *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings* at [http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/mold\\_remediation.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/mold_remediation.html) or the NYC guidance at <http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/doh/html/epi/moldrpt1.html>
- Learn more about indoor air quality problems and establishing school Environmental Health and Safety Committees using the EPA Tools For Schools Kit at <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/tfs/iaqback.html>
- Contact MassCOSH Healthy Schools Initiative for technical assistance and training at 617-825-7233 x19, [www.masscosh.org](http://www.masscosh.org)