

Mold in Homes - Facts versus Fears

By [Bruce A. Barker](#)

Mold (fungi) must have hired a public relations consultant. It seems to be getting more press coverage these days than it has during its billions of years on our planet. Here are some facts to help you separate informed thought from hype surrounding the fungus among us.

1. Mold is everywhere (and has been for a very long time).
2. It appears to cause allergic reactions in some people; however, there is no proven link between it and more serious conditions in otherwise healthy people. There is some evidence of serious allergic reactions by some people to some fungi. These reactions are rare and usually occur in people with other conditions such as compromised immune systems. Consult a doctor if you have questions about health effects of fungi.
3. Its presence in unusual quantities is a symptom of the failure to properly control moisture in the home. Fixing water leaks, establishing proper drainage around the home, and maintaining proper humidity levels in the home will go a long way toward curing fungal (and other) problems.
4. There are no authoritative and widely accepted standards for fungal testing including how to perform tests, who is qualified to perform tests, and what are acceptable levels of exposure. Testing "protocols" have not been subjected independent, peer-reviewed, scientific evaluation. Many "certified" testers have attended no more than a one to three day seminar conducted by testing labs.

Based on our research and experience, we believe that the following general recommendations are appropriate for most homeowners.

1. Control fungi by controlling moisture in the home. Fix water leaks, establish proper drainage away from the foundation of the home, and use kitchen and bath fans that exhaust to the outdoors.
2. Ensure that your heating and cooling system is operating properly and is properly maintained. Have the system professionally serviced at least once per year. Have the system evaluated if it cycles between running and not running for short time periods (short cycles). Change your filters regularly. Pour about 1/2 cup of bleach into the condensate drain pipe at least once a year. Have the evaporator coils and drip pan professionally cleaned as needed.
3. Clean small areas of surface mold with detergent. Remove and replace heavily water-damaged materials. Use care when working with infested wood and with chemicals. Fungal spores can disperse when disturbed and can contaminate other areas. Infested and damaged surfaces in excess of about 10 square feet should be referred to a certified remediation specialist.
4. Don't bother testing for fungi unless instructed to do so by a doctor or other qualified health professional. If you choose to have a test, use a qualified industrial hygienist and a qualified lab to analyze the test results.

Finding mold is usually not a crisis. Simply following the moisture, stopping it at the source, and repairing any damage will cure most problems. Don't let yourself be frightened into spending money unnecessarily on mold testing and remediation.