

## Got Mold? - Part 1

"If you can see or smell mold, a health risk may be present. No matter what type of mold is present, you should remove it."

-- U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention ("the CDC")

**Q. Why did the mushroom go to the party?**

**A. Because he was a fungi.**

-- Elementary school joke

Over the past few years, more consumers have become concerned about possible bad health effects from high levels of indoor mold.

This column reviews some common questions received by the Legal Aid Society about mold problems.

### **Q. What are molds?**

Molds are everywhere, and there are over 100,000 species of molds. They are neither animal nor plant, but are microscopic organisms that produce enzymes to digest organic matter and spores to reproduce. They are kin to mushrooms, yeast, and mildews.

### **Q. What makes mold appear and grow?**

Molds spores are everywhere, but molds grow where there is moisture. When moisture is present, molds can grow on wood, ceiling tiles, paint, carpets, sheet rock, and insulation. Since they are everywhere, there is no way to totally eliminate molds and mold spores – so, the key to controlling mold growth is to control moisture.

When moisture allows molds to grow in quantity, then mold may be recognized by:

- Sight (Are the walls and ceiling discolored, or do they show signs of mold growth or water damage?)
- Smell (Do you smell a bad odor, such as a musty, earthy smell or a foul stench?)

### **Q. How is mold a health hazard?**

If you have allergies or asthma, however, you may be sensitive to molds. You might experience skin rash, running nose, eye irritation, cough, congestion, and aggravation of asthma. Also, if you have an immune suppression or underlying lung disease, you may be at increased risk for infections from molds.

Generally, most common molds are not a concern to someone who is healthy. However, many molds produce biological poisons called mycotoxins in defense against other molds and bacteria. In large enough quantity, these mycotoxins may cause toxic effects in people.

Healthy persons may experience fatigue, nausea, headaches, and respiratory and eye irritation from exposure to mycotoxins. If you or your family members have health problems that you suspect are caused by exposure to mold, you should consult with your physician.

### **Q. What are the laws about indoor mold?**

The federal government does not regulate mold or mold spores in indoor air. The CDC and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are careful to note that they can only present "recommendations" for dealing with mold.

This means that it is up to state laws and local ordinances. Some states have laws that require landlords and building owners to give tenants notice of mold problems, but Tennessee has no such laws.

The Metro Nashville Public Health Department notes that "there are no regulatory limits for mold in the home or work environment," and urges consumers to look for a moisture source if they suspect a mold problem. On the other hand, the Health Department does concede that once mold appears in wallboard or insulation, "the only way to deal with the problem is by removal and replacement."

If your home, school, or work building has mold problems you can see or smell, you should start with written notice to your landlord, principal, or local health department.

by Jim Hawkins, Managing Attorney, Gallatin office, Legal Aid Society

**Note:** This column is not intended to take the place of legal advice. All cases are different and need individual attention. Consult with a private attorney of your choice to review the facts and law specific to your case.

The Legal Aid Society is a non-profit law firm, not a government agency, and all calls are strictly confidential. If you need more information on this or other common legal problems, please visit our Web site at [www.las.org](http://www.las.org) or call 1-800-238-1443.