

Exposure to Mold

Information for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women

This sheet talks about the risks that exposure to mold can have during pregnancy. With each pregnancy, all women have a 3% to 5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

What is mold?

Molds are fungi that can be found both indoors and outdoors. They tend to grow in warm, damp places. Molds spread by making spores that are able to live almost anywhere. The damp conditions after a water leak or a flood can cause mold to grow in homes.

Mold can be many different colors. Mold can also have a musty, earthy smell. The four most common molds that grow in homes are *Cladosporium*, *Penicillium*, *Alternaria*, and *Aspergillus*.

Can mold make me sick?

Some molds produce substances that can make people sick. Symptoms from mold exposure include stuffy nose, itchy or watery eyes, rashes, wheezing, and sometimes fever and shortness of breath. Not everyone who is exposed to mold will have these symptoms. People who have asthma and other chronic breathing problems can be more sensitive to mold. People who have a weak immune system are at higher risk for getting a mold infection in their lungs. If you have been exposed to mold and have any of these symptoms, talk to a health care provider right away.

I am pregnant and there is mold in my home. Is my baby at risk?

There are no human studies that look at exposure to mold during pregnancy. Studies have shown that the substances that molds produce may raise the risk of birth defects in animals. These studies may not apply to humans because the animals were exposed to these substances in a very different way than a human might be exposed.

If you are pregnant and there is mold in your home, it should be removed quickly. If you have any of the symptoms of mold exposure, talk to a health care provider right away.

What if there is mold in my home while I'm breastfeeding?

There are no studies that look at exposure to mold during breastfeeding. Because mold in the home might make both the mother and baby sick, it should be removed from the home right away.

How can I keep mold out of my home?

- Keep the moisture levels in your home between 40% and 60%. Devices that measure the moisture level (humidity) are called hygrometers. You can buy them at hardware stores, department stores, and electronics stores for under \$50.

- Use an air conditioner or dehumidifier during humid months.
- Use exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms.
- Clean bathrooms with products that kill mold.
- Do not put carpet in bathrooms and basements.

How can I clean up mold after a water leak or flood?

Important Note: Pregnant women should avoid cleaning large areas of mold themselves. If possible, have another family member, friend, or professional do the clean up.

- Open windows and doors to provide fresh air.
- Always wear goggles and rubber gloves when cleaning up mold.
- Remove all items that have been wet for more than 48 hours and that cannot be cleaned and dried completely. These may include carpeting, upholstery (such as sofas and chairs), wallpaper, drywall, floor and ceiling tiles, insulation, clothing, leather, paper, wood, and food.
- To remove mold growth from hard surfaces, use cleaners from the store or a bleach solution of 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water. A recent study showed that a bleach solution is the best way to kill mold.

Important note: Never mix bleach with ammonia. Mixing bleach and ammonia causes fumes that can make you very sick.

- If you have questions about cleaning up mold in your home, call the Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse at 800-438-4318

Is "black mold"(Stachybotrys) worse than the other common molds? Should I be worried if I have this mold in my home?

Stachybotrys is a greenish-black mold. It can grow in homes, but it is not common. There are a few reports of molds such as *Stachybotrys* causing bleeding in the lungs in infants. But these cases are rare, and there is not enough information to prove that they were caused by mold.

If you think that your home may have *Stachybotrys*, you do NOT need to have it tested. ALL molds could possibly make you sick, so they should all be cleaned and removed as soon as possible. *Stachybotrys* should be cleaned up in the same way as any other type of mold.

To Learn More About:

Exposures during pregnancy or breastfeeding,
call the *Organization of Teratology Information Specialists* at

866-626-6847

or visit them online at www.OTISpregnancy.org.

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