



GENERAL TERMS FOR MOLD & ALLERGENS

Allergen

An allergen is a substance that elicits an IgE antibody response and is responsible for producing allergic reactions. Chemicals are released when IgE on certain cells come into contact with an allergen. These chemicals can cause injury to surrounding tissue – the visible signs of an allergy. Only a few fungal allergens have been characterized but all fungi are thought to be potentially allergenic. Fungal allergens are proteins found in either the mycelium or spores.

“Black Mold”

The poorly defined term “Black mold” or “Toxic black mold” has usually been associated with the mold *Stachybotrys chartarum*. While there are only a few molds that are truly black, there are many that can appear black. Not all molds that appear to be black are *Stachybotrys*.

Fungi

Fungi are neither animals nor plants and are classified in a kingdom of their own. The Kingdom of Fungi. Fungi include a very large group of organisms, including molds, yeasts, mushrooms, and puffballs. There are > 100,000 accepted fungal species but current estimates range to 1.5 million species. Mycologists (people who study fungi) have grouped fungi into four large groups according to their method of reproduction.

Hidden Mold

This refers to visible mold growth on building structures that is not easily seen, including the areas above drop ceilings, within a wall cavity (the space between the inner and outer structure of a wall), inside air handlers, or within the ducting of a heating/ventilation system.

Microbial Volatile Organic Compounds (MVOCs)

Fungi produce chemicals as a result of their metabolism. Some of these chemicals, MVOCs, are responsible for the characteristic moldy, musty, or earthy smell of fungi, whether mushrooms or molds. Some MVOCs are considered offensive or annoying. Specific MVOCs are thought to be characteristic of wood rot and mold growth on building materials. The human nose is very sensitive to mold odors and sometimes more so than current analytical instruments.

Mold

Molds are a group of organisms that belong to the Kingdom of Fungi (see Fungi). Even though the terms mold and fungi had been commonly referred to interchangeably, all molds are fungi, but not all fungi are molds.

Mycotoxin

Mycotoxins are compounds produced by some fungi that are toxic to humans or animals. By convention, the term “Mycotoxin” excludes mushroom toxins. Fungi that produce mycotoxins are called “toxigenic fungi”.

Spore

General term for a reproductive structure in fungi, bacteria and some plants. In fungi, the spore is the structure which may be used for dissemination and may be resistant to adverse environmental conditions.

Toxic Mold

The term “toxic mold” has no scientific meaning since the mold itself is not toxic. The metabolic byproducts of some molds may be toxic (see mycotoxin).

Hypha (plural, hyphae)

An individual fungal thread or filament of connected cells, the thread that represents the individual parts of the fungal body.