University of Colorado
Environmental Health and Safety Guideline

MOLD AND WATER INTRUSION

Molds are forms of fungi, part of the natural environment and around us at all times. Recently, mold's implication to poor indoor air quality and the potential for adverse health effects have been covered extensively in the media. However, the real risks surrounding exposure to mold growth are incomplete and often times controversial.

Molds play a role in nature by aiding in the decomposition of organic matter. During organic decomposition, molds proliferate by producing and releasing spores which are invisible to the naked eye. These airborne spores passively land on surfaces and can begin growing by digesting the organic material present if the surface is wet and the growing conditions are right. When outdoors, the microbial decomposition process is not typically considered a health hazard due to dilution in the atmosphere; however, mold growth indoors can be of concern due to spore accumulation in indoor air and the potential for inhalation.

Molds do not affect all people and there is wide variability in how people react to mold exposure. Health symptoms are often noted more severely and quickly in infants, the elderly as well as persons with weakened immune systems or preexisting respiratory conditions (e.g. allergies, asthma). However, a sensitization to mold can develop if mold growth is an indoor environment is left unaddressed.

It is important to note that each specific mold species needs optimal growing conditions, including light cycles, moisture content and an organic growing medium. Water removal and drying of wetted building materials within 48 hours is likely to prevent mold growth. In the event of a water release in your work area or building please contact Facilities Management as soon as possible. If you detect a musty odor in your building, similar to a typical basement type smell, please contact EH&S to help determine the source and if there had been an unnoticed water leak.