

Toxic Black Mold: Symptoms of Black Mold Poisoning

Exposure to mildew or mold can result in some serious effects on the human health. Every year, thousands of people suffer from toxic black mold poisoning. In such circumstances, being aware of the symptoms of black mold poisoning (and the steps that are to be taken in case of mold infestation) can be of a great help.

Have you ever observed a fuzzy black coating on your bathroom and bedroom walls? This can be caused by toxic black mold or mildew. Thriving in wet and humid environment, the toxic fungi cover the walls and other surfaces in a powdery black substance. Black mold is present everywhere around us, outdoors as well as indoors.

At home, the mold can be easily seen on the walls, ceilings, clothing, furniture, carpets, food and other places, if it is present. It can also flourish on equipment that we use everyday, like air conditioners. The mold which appears as fuzzy blotches of yellow, black, green and red are often associated with an unpleasant odor as well. While it may look unsightly and smell horrible, the real danger of this fungi lies in the toxins that it releases.

What is Toxic Black Mold?

Black mold, also known as *Stachybotrys chartarum* or *Stachybotrys atra*, is toxigenic in nature. This means that the mold by itself is not toxic, rather it produces certain toxic substances known as mycotoxins. Unlike common indoor molds like *Aspergillus*, *Cladosporium* and *Alternaria*, the *Stachybotrys chartarum* mold is not so commonly found indoors. However, when it is present in our surroundings, this mold releases the toxic spores mycotoxins. Exposure to these toxic spores in the air that we breathe and contaminated food we eat can cause black mold poisoning. The Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC) released from the mold spores lead to fungal infections, allergies,

hypersensitivity, allergic asthma, sinus congestion, and other respiratory and nervous system disorders.

Black Mold Poisoning Symptoms

The severity of the poisoning symptoms depends on the exposure time and quantity of spores that an individual is exposed to. Younger children, people with a weak immune system, and the elderly people can suffer more from these severe black mold poisoning symptoms. Even otherwise, healthy individuals can suffer from some of the obvious symptoms of black mold poisoning, like allergic reactions of the respiratory and/or the nervous system. Other than these, the symptoms range from chronic fatigue and reddening of the eyes to infertility and miscarriage. The most common symptoms of black mold poisoning are:

Black Mold and Respiratory Problems

One of the most common signs of black mold poisoning are respiratory issues. Exposure to the mold spores in the air can lead to labored breathing, wheezing, chest congestion, increased production of mucus, chronic coughing, and frequent respiratory tract illnesses. A person may experience a burning sensation in the throat or suffer from nosebleeds as well.

Black Mold Induced Allergies

Mold can invade the human system and result in a number of allergies, especially if an individual has an overly-sensitive immune system. The mold develops hyphae, which are small spores containing appendages. The air containing this mold, when inhaled, can lead to a number of allergic reactions. Some of the common signs of allergic reactions caused by mold include:

- Runny nose
- Watery red eyes
- Coughing
- Itchy nose and throat

If a person already suffers from asthma, then the mold allergy can trigger off asthmatic symptoms like wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath. Food allergies and stomach ulcers are also quite common when one is exposed to mold for a long time.

Black Mold and Nervous System Disorders

Mold toxicity leads to the production of PEA and glutamate. These brain chemicals produces electrifying brain signals that leads to an over electrified nervous system. This is one of the key reasons for insomnia, anxiety attacks, panic disorder and bipolar disorder in individuals exposed to toxic black mold for a long period. Immune system disorders, caused by the release of Chloral Hydrate which is a sedative that fights the black mold toxins, can lead to weakness, headaches, lethargy, drowsiness, aches and pains especially around the muscle, chest, joints and abdominal areas. In some cases fever, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea symptoms can also be observed.

Black Mold and Skin Troubles

The toxins released by black mold can enter the body through the skin and cause skin rashes. Dermatitis, which can be identified by rashes, hives blisters, skin inflammation can be caused by black mold poisoning.

Black Mold and Circulatory System Disorders

Mycotoxins present in black mold when breathed in or ingested can make their way to a person's blood stream and cause a number of circulatory system disorders. Hemorrhaging, blood clotting, irregular heartbeat, and low blood pressure are some common circulatory system disorders caused by mold toxicity.

Black Mold Poisoning during Pregnancy

Pregnant women have to watch out for the signs of black mold poisoning. This is because black mold is teratogenic which means it can cause developmental impairment and birth defects if the fetus is exposed to the toxins during pregnancy. Although there are no studies to attest to this fact

but black mold toxicity is also linked to infertility and miscarriage.

Other Symptoms of Black Mold Poisoning

Toxic black mold exposure and poisoning can lead to many other health problems. These include:

- Vision troubles
- Eye inflammation
- Blurry vision
- Ringing in the ears
- Hearing loss
- Sensitivity to sound
- Bad taste in the mouth
- Weight loss and hair loss
- Infections of urinary tract
- Problems in urination
- Pain in liver and other internal organs

On re-exposure to toxic molds, a person can suffer from anaphylaxis which is a life-threatening allergic reaction to the toxins.

What are Signs of Mold?

You can detect the growth of toxic mold within your house or building by looking out for some telltale signs of the same. These telltale signs of mold growth, which range from formation of greenish-black colored patches on the walls to increasing instances of health issues in people occupying the 'said' structure, are discussed below.

⇒ **Moisture on the Surfaces:** Moisture or dampness on surfaces (of wall, wood, clothes, etc.) can be treated as the very first sign of mildew growth. While moisture does not necessarily indicate the presence of mold, it is an important condition for mold formation and growth. If you reside in a region wherein Relative Humidity (RH) exceeds 55 percent, you but obviously need to keep an eye for mold infestation in your home.

⇒ **Stains on the Wall:** Yellowish stains on the wall caused due to moisture help initial growth of mold. You need to look out for the greenish, blackish or brownish-colored patches on the damp wall as these patches characterize mold growth on the walls. Other than these black damp spores on walls, cracked or peeling paint can also be a sign of the presence of mold.

⇒ **Unusual Odor:** Mildew or musty odors is one of the most prominent signs of mold growth on surfaces. At times, you may only experience this 'unusual' smell when your air conditioner or HVAC system is on. If that is the case, you will have to check the particular equipment for mold growth as it usually happens when mold forms within the equipment. If you experience any unusual odor near damp/humid surfaces, you should look out for the other signs of mold growth.

⇒ **Respiratory System Response in People:** If one or more people occupying the structure experience some kind of allergic reaction or respiratory problem when they are indoors, then there is a possibility of high mold growth. Again this is just one of the several signs, and you need to look out for other signs to ascertain the presence of mold within the house.

Poisoning due to the Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) formed by the mold is one of the most prominent signs of potential mold growth. After mold formation, it needs nutrition to grow, which it obtains by degrading the surface on which it is growing. During the process of degrading the surface for nutrition, the black mold on the wall contributes to the formation of VOCs. High exposure to VOCs formed by mold can affect human respiratory and central nervous systems, and even cause irritation to mucous membranes.

How Can Toxic Mold be Controlled?

As mentioned earlier, molds are ubiquitous in nature, that is they are found everywhere - including your home and workplace, and hence it is nearly impossible to get rid of them. However, it is possible to control the growth of mold on surfaces by taking some precautionary measures which ensure that the conditions hospitable for mold growth don't occur in the first place. Discussed below are some simple measures which will help you do away with mold, and the health hazards they pose.

- Moisture is one of the most important factors when it comes to mold growth, and thus the best way to keep a check on mold growth is to keep a check on the humidity levels within your home.
- Dehumidification as and when required can help you keep a check on the humidity levels, while monitoring Relative humidity will help you find out when you will need to dehumidify your building/house.
- If there is any water leakage/intrusion, pipe leak, roof leak, condensation problem, etc., it should be promptly repaired.
- You will have to ensure that the air conditioners, HVAC systems, and air/ventilation ducts are clean, as the mold formed in these systems usually goes unnoticed and therefore is more dangerous. Drip fans in the air conditioner needs to be checked regularly to avoid the mold growth.
- Bathrooms are the most prone places for mold formation and growth, and therefore you should clean the tiles, curtains and appliances inside the bathroom regularly to avoid mold infestation. Venting fans in the bathroom can help in keeping it clean and dry.
- Use of air purifiers to cleanse the air inside your house is yet another option to tackle mold infestation as these air purifiers help in reducing the airborne particles of mold spores.
- Bleach water is a good way of cleaning the mold in a small space. Mix one cup of bleach in a gallon of water and use it to scrub away the mold. Remember to wear protective clothing and goggles while doing so as the bleach can damage your hands.
- You can also resort to some paints/anti-mold products available in the market as these products can resist moisture to a certain extent, and help in prevention of mold. Hiring professional help for mold removal is also advisable.

In conclusion, it is very important to monitor the humidity levels in your surroundings and take necessary precautions to make sure that you don't provide haven for molds by leaving damp corners in your house. If you live in some area wherein high humidity levels prevail, then you need to keep an eye for black mold growth and health hazards associated with it.

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