Health Notes by Evelyn Ames
MOLDS Growing in Your Home: How They Affect Your Health!

"It is important to dry water damaged areas and items within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth."
Environmental Protection Agency

When you are in your home, do you experience a skin rash, running nose, eye irritation, cough, nasal congestion, or difficulty in breathing? You may have a hidden culprit! Mold may be growing in various places in your home. People with allergies or asthma and those with immune suppression or underlying lung disease may be at increased risk for infections from molds. "Molds become a problem when they go where they are not wanted and digest materials such as our homes" (Washington Department of Health). When molds are disturbed, they release spores into the air that can be easily inhaled. Exposure to molds occurs by touching moldy items and then touching the mouth or nose or eating moldy food. http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/iaq/got_mold.html

What makes molds grow in a home? Molds enter homes as tiny spores. Moisture helps spores "grow on almost any surface, including; wood, ceiling tiles, wallpaper, paints, carpet, sheet rock, and insulation." Mold grows best when there is a lot of moisture from a leaky roof, from high humidity, or when flooding occurs. Keeping a home dry can help control mold growth. "Mold can also be found growing along walls where warm moist air condenses on cooler wall surfaces, such as inside cold exterior walls, behind dressers, headboards, and in closets where articles are stored against walls. Mold often grows in rooms with both high water usage and humidity, such as kitchens, bathrooms, laundry rooms, and basements" (Washington Department of Health).

When is mold a problem? "You know you have mold when you smell the "musty" odor or see small black or white specks along your damp bathroom or basement walls. Some mold is hidden growing behind wall coverings or ceiling tiles. Even dry, dead mold can cause health problems" (WA DOH). Always take precautions when suspected and take action to control growth or eliminate it.

David Blake at the Northwest Clean Air Agency in the Division of Environmental Health within the Office of Environmental Health, Safety, and Toxicology narrates the video "Controlling for mold growth in your home! http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/iaq/got_mold.html

The **WA Department of Health** offers the following suggestion for controlling mold growth:

- Stop water leaks, repair leaky roofs and plumbing. Keep water away from concrete slabs and basement walls.
- Open windows and doors to increase air flow in your home, especially along the inside of exterior walls. Use a fan if there are no windows available.
- Make sure that warm air flows into all areas of the home. Move large objects a few inches away from the inside of exterior walls to increase air circulation.
- Install and use exhaust fans in bathrooms, kitchens, and laundry rooms.
- Ventilate and insulate attic and crawl spaces. Use heavy plastic to cover earth floors in crawl spaces.
- Clean and dry water damaged carpets, clothing, bedding, and upholstered furniture within 24 to 48 hours, or consider removing and replacing damaged furnishings.
- Vacuum and clean your home regularly to remove mold spores.
- Check around your windows for signs of condensation and water droplets. Wipe them up right away so mold can't start to grow.

EPA suggests "Ten Things You Should Know About Mold" http://www.epa.gov/mold/index.html

1. Potential health effects and symptoms associated with mold exposures include allergic reactions, asthma, and other respiratory complaints.

2. There is no practical way to eliminate all mold and mold spores in the indoor environment; the way to control indoor mold growth is to control moisture.
3. If mold is a problem in your home or school, you must clean up the mold and eliminate sources of moisture.
4. Fix the source of the water problem or leak to prevent mold growth.
5. Reduce indoor humidity (to 30-60%) to decrease mold growth by: venting bathrooms, dryers, and other moisture-generating sources to the outside; using air conditioners and de-humidifiers; increasing ventilation; and using exhaust fans whenever cooking, dishwashing, and cleaning.
6. Clean and dry any damp or wet building materials and furnishings within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth.
7. Clean mold off hard surfaces with water and detergent, and dry completely. Absorbent materials such as ceiling tiles, that are moldy, may need to be replaced.
8. Prevent condensation: Reduce the potential for condensation on cold surfaces (i.e., windows, piping, exterior walls, roof, or floors) by adding insulation.
9. In areas where there is a perpetual moisture problem, do not install carpeting (i.e., by drinking fountains, by classroom sinks, or on concrete floors with leaks or frequent condensation).
10. Molds can be found almost anywhere; they can grow on virtually any substance, providing moisture is present. There are molds that can grow on wood, paper, carpet, and foods.

Check out the US Environmental Protection Agency's "A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home" at **http://www.epa.gov/iedmold1/moldguide.html** **The table of contents includes: Mold Basics; Mold Cleanup; Mold Cleanup Guidelines; What to Wear When Cleaning Moldy Areas; Moisture and Mold Prevention and Control Tips; Hidden Mold**

To view pictures of mold in homes, go to http://www.epa.gov/iedmold1/moldcourse/imagegallery1.html and click on mold in buildings under image gallery.

***All issues of Health Notes (starting with the 2005 issue of WWURA Newsletter) can be found at: http://www.wwu.edu/wwura Scroll down to click on Health Notes.**