



# NEWS RELEASE

## EUROPE REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

CMR. 442 APO AE 09042  
U.S. ARMY HOSPITAL – NACHRICHTEN KASERNE  
POSTFACH 103180 69021 HEIDELBERG, GERMANY  
DSN 371-3317/3049 TEL. 06221-17-3317/3049  
PHIL TEGTMEIER CELL – 0162-270-1578

---

April 30, 2007

### ***Mold and your environment:***

It's everywhere, it's everywhere

**HEIDELBERG**, Germany – There's mold, the harmless kind, then there's mold, the dangerous kind, and knowing the difference can keep you from getting sick. Molds are always present in the environment and for most people they do not pose a health risk.

"Molds are a type of fungus," said Capt. Matthew Perry, an environmental science and engineer officer and chief of environmental health for the U.S. Army Medical Department Activity – Bavaria. "They grow by creating microscopic spores that float through the air both indoors and outdoors."

Perry said that because of mold spores' incredibly small size, it is impossible to completely rid your home or work environment of them. Molds can feed on a wide range of material and require a water (moisture) source to survive.

Reports on TV and in newspapers commonly refer to harmful mold as "black mold" or "toxic mold."

"This is not accurate," said Perry. "There are over 100,000 different species of molds throughout the world, and they come in many different colors, such as black, green, yellow, orange, brown, and white."

Perry said there are harmless and harmful molds. "Some may be black, some may be other colors, but you can't tell which is which strictly by the color," he explained.

Of the approximately 1000 common household molds studied, less than 200 are identified as being harmful pathogens to humans.

About 10 percent of the general population and 40 percent of people with asthma are allergic to fungus, according to the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM).

“For people sensitive to mold, the most common reaction will be characteristic of hay fever-like symptoms; red, itchy eyes, runny nose, headache, and/or fever. For people with asthma, exposure to molds can make their asthma worse, but there is no evidence that mold exposures cause asthma in people,” says Perry.

Those with weakened immune systems or chronic lung diseases are also at an increased risk of developing fungal infections in their lungs.

Well documented case studies show that some molds produce toxins that can cause serious illnesses. Usually, the serious illness comes from eating foods contaminated with high levels of mold toxins.

“Because we know that molds can cause disease and illness in some people, we strongly recommend that these people take steps to prevent mold growth in their home and work areas,” said Perry. “If you suspect that mold is making you sick, discuss this with your health care provider.” Perry explained that a correct diagnosis is necessary so that professionally trained public health officials can conduct an assessment of the problem.

There is no established data to show “safe” levels of mold because each person reacts differently to different levels of mold. “So in most cases, providers don’t have to request a mold sampling of someone’s environment,” said Perry.

He added that mold spores are everywhere and when found, all molds should be treated the same. “The risk of exposure to molds is minimal in most people, and reactions to molds vary from person to person.

It is impossible to completely remove all molds from the indoors, so moisture control is the key to mold control. USACHPPM recommends a humidity level of 60 percent or less. Using fans while cooking and showering can help so long as you vent them to the outside. Another way to control moisture is to open windows while cooking and showering..

To minimize the risk of mold growing in work and home areas, identify and eliminate the source of moisture or water. Residents should ventilate their quarters for at least 10 minutes a day and after each shower by opening windows to create a cross draft. This helps to reduce the potential for mold and mildew growth.

“Be aware though, molds damage what they grow on, so the longer they have to grow, the more damage they are likely to cause,” said Perry.

### ***Getting rid of mold***

For small jobs, usually about 10 square feet, it is usually not necessary to call a professional. Perry gives this advice:

1. Scrub moldy surfaces with detergents and water or a bleach solution of one cup of bleach to one gallon of water (caution: never mix bleach with other cleaning solutions as the chemicals could react and be extremely dangerous).
2. Allow the material time to dry completely.
3. Discard porous or absorbent material if cleaning agents do not go deep enough to kill all of the mold spores.
4. Mold will grow back if the water source was not removed,
5. Do not paint or caulk moldy surfaces. Remove the mold first, then allow the material to completely dry before painting or caulking.
6. You may need to discard moldy stuffed furniture if the mold cannot be completely removed.

For larger areas or for cleaning items with sentimental or high value, you may wish to consult a professional or specialist. Be sure to notify the housing office of any problems that need professional resolution,

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) publications, *A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home* and *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings*, outline steps to take to remedy large and small projects. Both of these are available free from the EPA's website at <http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html>.

In Brief:

- Not all molds are harmful.
- Visual inspection alone cannot identify harmful mold. Regardless of the type of mold it is, the remediation steps are the same.
- Mold MUST have water (moisture) to survive. Eliminate the water source and you will eliminate the mold problem.
- Clean mold with soap and water or a bleach solution and allow drying.
- Mold remediation is not complete until the water (moisture) source is identified and eliminated.
- Different people will react differently to exposure to mold. Address health issues on individual basis between you and your health care provider. If you suspect mold is affecting you or your family's health in the home or workplace, discuss this with a health care provider so an accurate diagnosis can be made.

For additional information, please visit the USACHPPM (<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/mold>), CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov/mold/>), EPA (<http://www.epa.gov/mold/>), and/or the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (<http://www.acoem.org/guidelines.aspx?id=850>) websites; or call the environmental science officer at 476-3216.

