



## **Mold Growth in Buildings: Is There a Water Leak?**

Molds are a type of fungi that can be found both indoors and outdoors. There are tens of thousands and possibly hundreds of thousands of different molds. They grow best in warm, damp, and humid conditions. Molds reproduce by creating tiny spores. Outdoors, molds break down organic matter such as toppled trees, fallen leaves, and dead animals. They are necessary to produce certain foods and medicines such as cheese and penicillin. Indoors, excessive mold growth can contribute to health problems.

### When are molds a problem?

Mold growth will often occur when there is excessive moisture or when water accumulates within a building. There are molds that grow on wood, paper, carpet, and insulation, as well as dust and dirt that gather in moist areas of a building. Unless water is present in a building, it is unlikely that mold will grow and cause a problem. At OHSU, buildings are equipped with air filtration systems that filter out the majority of mold spores and allergens from the outside air.

### What are the health effects of molds?

Molds produce allergens that can cause allergic reactions in some people. Reactions can appear right away or develop over time. Allergic responses include asthma and hay fever-type symptoms such as a runny nose and red eyes. Exposure to mold can irritate the eyes, skin, nose and throat. Symptoms other than allergic and irritant types are not commonly reported as a result of inhaling mold in the indoor environment.

### How can mold problems be prevented or corrected?

While it is impossible to eliminate all molds and mold spores, minimizing moisture can control indoor mold growth. Sources of moisture include water leaks through roofs and window seals, landscaping, gutters that direct water into or under a building, and space heaters or other appliances that are not equipped with ventilation. Please call OHSU Facilities and Real Estate any time a water leak or excessive moisture buildup is detected in your building.

### Are there federal or state laws that exist to protect workers from molds?

There are no federal laws or state laws for exposure to airborne mold or mold spores.

Environmental Health and Radiation Safety can assess your area for possible mold growth and answer your questions! **Marquam Hill Campus: 503-494-7795 or West Campus: 503-748-1226**

