

MOLD HOUSING AND HEALTH

the science of mold and human

- Mold is a natural part of our environment
- Throughout our evolution, humans have lived with many kinds of mold
- There is no way to get rid of all mold in a building, and most people do not need to worry about small amounts of most kinds of mold
- But some kinds of mold (like “black mold” or *Stachybotrys chartarum*) can create serious health consequences, including neurological effects (from muscle weakness to hallucinations) as well as respiratory illnesses such as asthma
- Remember, the mold you see is only part of the fungus. If you can see mold spores on drywall, wood, or rugs, there are thread-like hyphae growing beneath the surface.
- Some people are more sensitive than others; if you or a family member is sensitive to mold, you need to take extra precautions

the threat of mold: one woman’s story — “Tatiana the Mold Lady’s story”

- Tatiana has been struggling with mold in her apartment for years and has done everything that tenants are told to do, from cleaning, to contacting her landlord, to contacting authorities
- The current system is flawed: it places enormous burdens on the people suffering from mold and often steers people in unhelpful or even dangerous directions
- Political and economic pressures (including eviction, homelessness, the ignorance of judges) increase the challenges of dealing with mold
- Tenants and homeowners need to learn more about mold, but so do judges, school officials, and many others in society

the politics of mold: dealing with mold in the city of Springfield/state of MA

Massachusetts Sanitary Code

- Unlike in some other states, the Sanitary Code in Massachusetts does not yet address mold
- The Department of Public Health has proposed changes to the Sanitary Code that would specifically require landlords to conduct mold inspections and ensure their properties are “free from mold and other fungi in amounts that may affect the health of the occupants.” We are still waiting for these changes to be accepted by the DPH.

Housing Law

- If a tenant suspects they have a mold problem, they should notify the landlord in writing
- If any dispute ends up in court, tenants should insist that the case be held in Housing Court (not in District Court)
- Keep a written record of everything you do and of all your communication with landlords, medical professionals, and officials.

INFORMATION FROM ARISE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE & SCIENCE FOR THE PEOPLE

building a community response

- Political problems need political responses, not just “bandaids”
- Mold is a problem not just in private homes but in public buildings
- The history of flooding and failure to maintain buildings has helped lead to the situation we are in today
- Community education and involvement is needed to ensure that the Sanitary Code is changed and that people get the help they need
- The story of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan offers important lessons about the power of community organizing

what we can do: tying it all together

- Check your house for mold (be aware but not panicked)
- If your house is damp, use a dehumidifier or fans (mold needs moisture to grow)
- If you find small amounts of mold, clean it with soap and water or with full strength household vinegar. Let vinegar soak into walls or other surfaces for an hour or so, to be absorbed into the hyphae, then wipe clean. Wear protective gloves, goggles, and a mask
- If you find large amounts (more than 10 square feet) of mold, inform your landlord in writing and ask for a mold inspection
- If you have any symptoms, go to the doctor and ask how mold may be affecting you
- Sign Tatiana’s petition on Change.org: “Mold Awareness and Regulations”
- Join our Mold Action Network to receive updates. Contact sigrid@history.umass.edu

RESOURCES

Arise for Social Justice, <http://arisespringfield.org> 413-794-4948

Western Mass Science for the People,
<http://westernmass.scienceforthepeople.org>

Springfield Healthy Homes, <http://springfieldhealthyhomes.org/>
413-794-2807



The CDC says: “Some people are sensitive to molds. For these people, exposure to molds can lead to symptoms such as stuffy nose, wheezing, and red or itchy eyes, or skin. Some people, such as those with allergies to molds or with asthma, may have more intense reactions. Severe reactions may include fever and shortness of breath. Exposure to mold or dampness may also lead to development of asthma in some individuals. Interventions that improve housing conditions can reduce morbidity from asthma and respiratory allergies.”
You can find more information at <https://www.cdc.gov/mold>