



# Mold

*be gone*

By Kenya McCullum

**Y**ou know it when you see it. And smell it. But what is mold exactly and why should we be concerned about it in our homes?

Mold is a type of fungus that can be found indoors and out. Although we generally think of it as a nuisance, it serves an important biological purpose because, when it's outdoors, it helps break down organic materials such as fallen leaves, dead plants and animals.

Indoor mold is another story. There are several species of mold that are toxic — and when we come into contact with the fungus in our homes, it can cause a myriad of health problems. For many people, mold triggers allergic reactions with symptoms that include eye irritation, nasal congestion, sneezing and itchy skin.

In more severe cases, mold may damage the body's organs, cause internal bleeding or lead to respiratory failure. The elderly and those with illnesses that compromise the immune system are particularly at

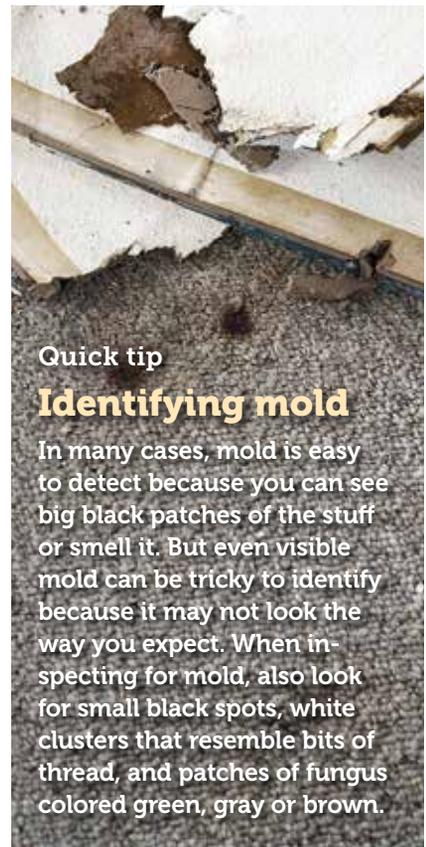
## What you should know about the creepy stuff

risk for these types of mold-related conditions.

### Testing and treatment

If you suspect you are susceptible to a mold-related illness, there are medical tests that can determine whether that's the case. One way to detect mold symptoms is through a skin test, in which purified mold is placed on the skin to find out if there is an allergic reaction. Doctors also can give a blood test that will reveal whether or not mold antibodies are present in a person's system.

If you have a mold allergy, taking over-the-counter allergy medication might offer some relief. If medications don't work, there are shots you can get from a doctor, but they are generally only given as a last resort. If the problem is in your house, the better option is likely removing the irritant.



#### Quick tip

#### Identifying mold

In many cases, mold is easy to detect because you can see big black patches of the stuff or smell it. But even visible mold can be tricky to identify because it may not look the way you expect. When inspecting for mold, also look for small black spots, white clusters that resemble bits of thread, and patches of fungus colored green, gray or brown.



## Where's it likely to be growing?

Mold thrives in environments that are warm, humid and damp. If conditions are favorable and interior humidity is not well controlled, you might find mold growing within easy sight, right on a home's walls. In addition, mold often can be found:

- ◆ Near leaky pipes and roofs.
- ◆ In areas that have moist, stagnant air, such as bathrooms and kitchens.
- ◆ In a basement that has flooded.
- ◆ Close to washers and dryers that are ventilated indoors.
- ◆ In air-conditioning drip pans and drain lines when the system is clogged.

## The big wipe-out



Several common household chemicals are effective in removing mold. When you go after the fungus, it's a good idea to wear cleaning gloves and to make sure the work area is adequately ventilated.

**Bleach.** Chlorine bleach is effective in killing most types of mold that grow inside homes. Mix one cup of bleach with 10 cups of water and use a spray bottle, sponge or cloth to apply the solution to the affected area. Bleach can help prevent mold from growing back, so there's no need to rinse as long as kids, pets and food don't touch the surface.

**Borax.** This natural laundry booster is a good alternative to bleach, particularly if you are sensitive to the smell of harsh cleaners. Add one cup of borax to 10 cups of water and scrub the area with a brush. Borax can also prevent mold, so there's no need to do anything else after the area has been treated.

**Hydrogen peroxide.** Hydrogen peroxide also works well when treating moldy areas because it is an anti-fungal

and anti-bacterial substance. To treat mold with peroxide, put a 3-percent concentration into a spray bottle and use it to saturate the moldy area. Let the peroxide sit on the mold for 10 minutes and then scrub it off with a brush. When you're done, thoroughly wipe the treated area to ensure that you have removed all of the mold.



**When to get extra help:** According to the Environmental Protection Agency, if mold grows more than 10 square feet in an area of a home, or if there has been interior water damage, a homeowner should consider hiring a contractor to help with cleanup.