

Weekly Column – Donna Krug, District Director and Family & Consumer Science Agent – Cottonwood Extension District

### Recent Rains Prompt Mold Questions

It didn't take long for the recent rains to bring a number of mold and mildew related questions to the Extension office. The saying "Water always wins" is so true. Whether it is a crack in the foundation, a leaky roof, or the water table raising so that water enters a basement or crawl space, water damage can take a toll on the health and well-being of family members.

Molds are usually not a problem during dry weather. However, when mold spores land on a wet or damp spot and begin growing, it doesn't take long for a problem to develop. Molds have the potential to cause health problems. Molds produce allergens, irritants, and in some cases, potentially toxic substances. Inhaling or touching mold or mold spores may cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals. Molds can also cause asthma attacks in people with asthma who are allergic to mold. In addition, mold exposure can irritate the eyes, skin, nose, throat, and lungs of both mold-allergic and non-allergic people.

Mold needs food in order to grow. Organic compounds like the back side of dry wall, wallpaper or paneling, the top side of ceiling tiles, or the underside of carpets and pads can feed mold. If wet or damp materials or areas are dried 24-48 hours after a leak or spill happens, in most cases mold will not grow. So you must act quickly when water damage happens.

During a flood cleanup, the indoor air quality in your home or office may appear to be the least of your problems. However, failure to remove contaminated materials and to reduce moisture and humidity can present serious long-term health risks. Standing water and wet materials are a breeding ground for microorganisms, such as viruses, bacteria, and mold. They can cause disease, trigger allergic reactions, and continue to damage materials long after the flood.

The best course of action if you detect mold growth is to clean and repair water damage immediately. Make sure the ground slopes away from the building foundation so that water does not enter or collect around the foundation. Keep indoor humidity below 60 percent (ideally between 30 and 50 percent) and increase ventilation with the use of fans.

People are constantly asking me "How do I test for mold?" The answer I share is from Curtis Reddington, an environmental specialist from Wichita, who shared a program about mold a few years ago. "If you see it or smell it, you have it." Since no EPA or other federal limits have been set for mold or mold spores, sampling cannot be used to check a building's compliance with federal mold standards.

There is an excellent EPA bulletin available on-line titled, "A Brief Guide to Controlling Mold, Moisture, and Your Home." It has information on identifying and cleaning up moldy areas. Just google the publication title and you will see the link.

*Donna Krug is the Family and Consumer Science Agent with K-State Research and Extension – Barton County. You may reach her at (620)793-1910 or [dkrug@ksu.edu](mailto:dkrug@ksu.edu)*