Mold

This sheet is about exposure to mold in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information is based on published studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare providers.

What is mold?

Mold is a type of fungus. Mold can live indoors or outdoors. It grows best in warm, wet, or humid places, especially areas damaged by water. Mold can be many colors and may smell musty or earthy. It spreads by sending tiny spores into the air. These spores can also travel on clothes or animals. Common household molds include *Cladosporium*, *Penicillium*, *Alternaria*, and *Aspergillus.*

Can mold make me sick?

Molds themselves do not make people sick. However, some molds produce toxins that can cause symptoms such as a stuffy nose, eye irritation, rash, wheezing, fever, or shortness of breath. Not everyone who is exposed to mold will have symptoms. People who have a weakened immune system or chronic (ongoing) respiratory condition, such as asthma, might be more sensitive to mold toxins. If you have any symptoms, talk to your healthcare provider.

Mold exposure has not been well studied in pregnancy. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding and you have found mold in your home, have it removed as soon as possible since it could affect your health or the health of your baby after delivery.

I have heard that Stachybotrys chartarum mold is worse than common household molds. Should I be worried if I have it in my home?

Stachybotrys chartarum is a greenish-black mold. Although less common, it can rarely be found in homes. Since all molds should be removed from the home as soon as possible, if you think your home might have *Stachybotrys chartarum*, you do not need to have it tested to find out what kind of mold it is. *Stachybotrys chartarum* should be removed in the same way as any other type of mold.

Can exposure to mold make it harder for me to get pregnant?

It is not known if exposure to mold can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does exposure to mold increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. It is not known if exposure to mold increases the chance of miscarriage.

Does exposure to mold increase the chance of birth defects?

Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like mold, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Animal studies have shown that mold can increase the chance of birth defects when it is eaten in large quantities. There is no proven risk in human pregnancy from exposure to airborne mold during pregnancy.

Does exposure to mold increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

There have been some research studies that suggest exposure to specific mycotoxins were associated with low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth), but other studies have not seen this. It is not known if exposure to mold might cause other pregnancy-related problems, such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37).

Does exposure to mold during pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

It is not known if exposure to mold during pregnancy can increase the chance for behavior or learning issues for the child.

How can I reduce my exposure to mold?

- Keep the moisture levels in the house as low as possible; on average lower than 50%.
- Use an air conditioner or dehumidifier during humid months.
- Use exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms.
- Clean bathrooms with mold killing products. Wear non-porous gloves and eye protection and have good air ventilation while cleaning.
- Do not put carpet in bathrooms or basements.

How can mold be cleaned up after a water leak or a flood?

- Wear a mask that can keep mold spores out of the air you breathe, such as an N95 respirator. For the mask or respirator to work properly, make sure to follow all instructions on the packaging.
- Wear non-porous gloves made from natural rubber, neoprene, nitrile, polyurethane, or PVC.
- Wear eye protection, such as goggles without air vents in them.
- Increase air ventilation while cleaning by keeping doors and windows open, air vents and fans turned on.
- Remove all items that have been wet for more than 48 hours if they cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried. This includes carpeting, upholstery, wallpaper, drywall, floor and ceiling tiles, insulation material, clothing, leather, paper, wood, and food.
- Remove mold growth from hard surfaces by using commercial mold cleaning products or a bleach solution (1 cup bleach in 1 gallon of water). Do not mix bleach with ammonia or other household cleaners. Always follow use and storage directions on the labels.
- If you are sensitive to mold or cleaning products, consider asking someone else to clean for you, especially in areas with poor ventilation.
- Professional companies can be hired to clean up flooded basements or other household areas.

Breastfeeding and exposure to mold:

Mold passes into breast milk in small amounts. Studies have shown that breastfeeding can help protect infants against developing asthma and allergies, including those related to mold exposure in the home. If you suspect the baby has

any symptoms related to mold (frequent sneezing, stuffy nose, watery, itchy eyes, coughing, wheezing, or shortness of breath), contact the child's healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a man is exposed to mold, could it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

It is not known if exposure to mold could affect male fertility (ability to make healthy sperm) or increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that men have are less likely to increase the risks to a pregnancy. For more general information, please see the MotherToBaby sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.

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