Mold

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

**What is mold?**

Molds are fungi that are able to live almost anywhere, indoors and outdoors. They grow best in warm, damp, and humid places, including water damaged areas. Molds can be different colors and can have a musty, earthy smell. They spread by releasing spores that can pass through the air and be carried on the clothing or on animals. Four common household molds are *Cladosporium*, *Penicillium*, *Alternaria*, and *Aspergillus*.

**Can mold make me sick?**

Molds themselves won’t make you sick, but some molds produce toxins that can cause health problems like allergic reaction. Common symptoms include stuffy nose, eye irritation, rash, and wheezing, and sometimes fever or shortness of breath. Not everyone has these symptoms. People who have a weakened immune system or a chronic (ongoing) respiratory condition, such as asthma, may be more sensitive to mold toxins. If you to have any of these symptoms, talk to your healthcare providers.

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

Stachybotrys is a greenish-black mold. It is less common in homes, but not rare. If you think your home may have Stachybotrys, you do not need to have it tested to find out what kind of mold it is. Since all molds can cause health problems, any mold should be removed from the home as soon as possible. Stachybotrys should be removed in the same way as any other type of mold.

**Can being around mold in my home make it harder for me to become pregnant?**

Mold exposure has not been well studied in pregnancy. Based on the available data, it is not known if exposure to mold could make it harder to become pregnant.

**Can being around mold in my home increase the chance for miscarriage?**

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. Mold exposure has not been well studied in pregnancy. Based on the available data, it is not known if exposure to mold increases the chance for miscarriage.

**Can being around mold in my home increase the chance of birth defects, pregnancy complications, or long-term problems in behavior or learning for the baby?**

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This is called the background risk. There is limited information about exposure to mold in pregnancy. Studies in animals have shown that mold can increase the chance of birth defects when it is eaten in large quantities, but there is no proven risk to a pregnancy or a baby from exposure to airborne mold during pregnancy.

If you are pregnant and you have found mold in your home, have it removed as soon as possible since it could affect your own health or the health of your baby after delivery. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any symptoms that might be from mold exposure.

**Is there anything I can do to reduce my exposure to mold?**

- Keep the moisture levels in the house as low as possible, but 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 I clean up mold 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.

Can I breastfeed if there is mold in my home?

Studies have shown that breastfeeding can help protect infants against developing asthma and allergies, including those related to mold exposure in the home. Even if you are breastfeeding, mold should still be removed from the home as soon as possible. If you suspect the baby has any symptoms related to mold, contact the child’s healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If I am exposed to mold, can it make it harder for me to get my partner pregnant or increase the chance of birth defects?

This question has not been studied. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase the risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.