



Illinois Department of Public Health

Division of Environmental Health

**FACT SHEET**

## Stachybotrys Chartarum (atra) – What You Need to Know!

### What is *Stachybotrys*?

*Stachybotrys*, commonly called “stachy,” is a greenish-black, slimy mold found only on cellulose products (such as wood or paper) that have been wet for several days or more. The mold does not grow on concrete, linoleum or tile.

### How is a person exposed to *Stachybotrys*?

*Stachybotrys* and some other fungi may produce several toxic chemicals called mycotoxins. Mycotoxins can be present in spores and small mold fragments released into the air. Once the mold fragments, mycotoxins and spores are in the air, individuals may breathe them into their lungs.

### What are the symptoms of exposure to *Stachybotrys* mycotoxins?

Symptoms of exposure to mycotoxins include coughing, wheezing, runny nose, irritated eyes or throat, skin rash and diarrhea. Since these symptoms are general in nature, they also can be caused by a cold, influenza or exposure to other allergens. It is not known what level of mycotoxin from *Stachybotrys* must be present in the air to cause these symptoms.

In 1994, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) investigated whether exposure to *Stachybotrys* might be related to pulmonary hemorrhage, also known as bleeding lungs, in infants in Cleveland, Ohio. While the CDC initially concluded that there was a possible link between exposure to the mold and the condition, *Stachybotrys* was not found in the homes of seven children with bleeding lungs identified in the Chicago area between April 1992 and January 1995. A subsequent review of the Cleveland study by a group of CDC experts concluded that a link between exposure to *Stachybotrys* and bleeding lungs in infants was **not** proven.

## What should I do if mold is found in my home?

Any mold can cause a health effect under the right conditions. While some reports exaggerate the severity of possible health effects, it is important to handle all molds with caution.

Testing for molds is very difficult and expensive, and it cannot determine whether health effects will occur. Due to these uncertainties, the Illinois Department of Public Health does not recommend testing for molds in most cases. If you can see or smell mold, testing is not necessary; it needs to be cleaned up.

## How can I clean moldy surfaces?

It is important to make sure that the source of moisture is stopped before the mold is cleaned up.

If this is not done, the mold will grow again. How you clean up areas contaminated with mold depends on the surface where the mold is growing. A professional should be consulted if large areas (more than 30 square feet) are contaminated with mold. If the surface is non-porous (varnished wood, tile, etc.), you can take the following steps.

1. The surfaces first need to be cleaned with soap.

- Use a non-ammonia soap or detergent in hot water and scrub the entire area affected by the mold. **Never mix bleach with ammonia; the fumes are toxic.**
- Use a stiff brush or cleaning pad on block walls or uneven surfaces.
- Rinse clean with water.

2. The next step is to disinfect the surfaces to help prevent mold from coming back.

- Disinfect the area with a solution of household bleach ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of bleach per gallon of water). Straight bleach will *not* be more effective. When mixing or using the solution, make sure the windows are open.
- For spraying large exterior areas, a garden hose and nozzle can be used.
- Let disinfecting areas dry naturally. This extended time is important to kill all the mold.

## How can I reduce my exposure to the mold while cleaning it up?

During the cleanup of molds, many spores may be released into the air. Mold counts in air are typically 10 to 1,000 times higher than background levels during the cleaning and removal of mold-damaged materials. To prevent health effects, there are several ways you can protect yourself while cleaning up the mold.

- Anyone with a chronic illness, such as asthma or emphysema, should *not* do the cleanup.
- Use a HEPA filter respirator purchased from a hardware store to reduce the mold spores you breathe in.
- Wear protective clothing that is easily cleaned or discarded.
- Wear rubber gloves.
- Do not allow family members or bystanders to be present when you are doing the cleanup.
- Work over short time spans and take breaks in a fresh air location.
- Open the windows in your house during and after the cleanup.
- Shut off heat or air conditioning to prevent mold spores from being spread around the home.
- Tightly cover the air return vent if there is one in the affected area.
- Turn on an exhaust fan or place a fan in a window to blow air out of the affected room to the outside (make sure the air is being blown *outside* the home, not into another room).
- Double bag materials before you remove them from the contaminated area.

**Where can I get more information?**

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