

The Invisible Toxin With Deadly Outcomes – Be Watchful

Symptoms can range from sneezing or coughing all the way to neurological distress or death. And no matter where you live, it's possible this invisible threat could wreak havoc on your pet - or you. Find out which spots are most well-known for it.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Molds are fungi that thrive in moist, warm environments
- There are certain species of mold that produce mycotoxins that can damage the health of your pet
- Toxic mold can be inhaled by your pet, or ingested or can cause an allergic reaction
- Symptoms of mold poisoning depend on the manner and level of exposure
- To prevent mold exposure in your pet, keep everything he comes in contact with inside your home clean and dry. Outdoors, insure he doesn't lick or ingest any item or surface that could have mold growth

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Molds are neither plants nor animals — they're fungi that play a vital role in the ecosystem by biodegrading organic matter. However, certain molds can cause serious health problems in pets who inhale or ingest them. In addition, mold is ubiquitous. It can grow in any moist, warm environment, both indoors and out. Mold can grow in everything from wet towels to drywall, and around windows and floors. Outdoors it can be found in food thrown in the garbage, rotting tree stumps and in soil.

Mold can easily be licked or the spores inhaled wherever it grows. Toxic mold produces mycotoxins that can damage the health of both humans and their pets. There are five species of toxic mold: Cladosporium, Penicillium, Fusarium, Aspergillus and Stachybotrys. Exposure to these molds can cause symptoms as mild as sneezing or coughing, all the way to neurologic problems and death.

Symptoms of Toxic Mold Exposure in Pets

If your pet has been poisoned by toxic mold, it will either be through inhalation, ingestion or an allergic reaction.

- **Symptoms of inhaled mold** include **respiratory distress** (difficult or rapid breathing), nasal discharge, coughing, wheezing, sneezing, lethargy and in severe cases, bleeding from the nose and/or mouth.
- **Symptoms of ingested mold** involve the gastrointestinal (GI) tract and include loss of appetite, vomiting and stool changes.
- **Symptoms of an allergic reaction to mold** include scratching, chewing, licking or biting at itchy areas of the body that can progress to skin sores and fur loss.

Some types of toxic mold also affect the nervous system, which can cause tremors and seizures. Regardless of how your pet is exposed to toxic mold, if you don't get veterinary help as soon as possible, it can damage the liver, kidneys, bones, spinal cord and brain.

Treatment for Mold Exposure

Treatment of toxic mold exposure in your dog or cat is primarily supportive and includes symptom management such as managing vomiting, breathing difficulties and dehydration. If the mold was ingested, natural detoxifying agents such as glutathione, NAC, artichoke extract, milk thistle and SAME (S-adenosylmethionine) can be very beneficial.

Most pets who receive quick veterinary attention after toxic mold exposure will make a full recovery. Obviously, preventing further exposure is the key to keeping your pet safe and healthy going forward, so it's important to identify and eliminate or avoid all sources of potentially toxic mold.

Tips for Keeping Your Pet Safe From Mold

A good rule of thumb is to develop the habit of keeping anything your pet comes in contact with clean and dry:

- Keep pet food in a sealed container in a cold, dry area (freezer)
- Wash food and water bowls at least once a day and throw out plastic dishes
- Launder your pet's bedding frequently, and immediately if it becomes damp
- Wash pet toys once a week

Don't give your pet access to the trash or any area where there might be moldy food or liquids. If he's an indiscriminate eater with his nose to the ground when he's outside, you'll need to provide close and constant supervision when you take him on walks, hikes or to the dog park. Check your home for signs of mold growth on drywall, baseboards, floors and around windows. In humid weather, consider investing in a dehumidifier to discourage mold growth.

If you suspect mold growth in your home, you can either buy a do-it-yourself test kit or you can call a professional mold removal service. If mold is discovered, it's a good idea to keep family members, including your pet, away from the area. In some cases, you might need to move your family or at least your pet to another location until the mold has been treated.

An Outdoor Mold You Definitely Want to Steer Clear Of

Blastomyces dermatitidis is an organism that grows in rotting wood and wet soil, and can cause a systemic fungal infection called blastomycosis. This species of mold thrives in wet outdoor environments like swamps, lakes and on riverbanks where damp soil and lack of direct sunlight encourage its growth. The fungus is also found in locations that harbor decaying organic matter like wooded areas, forests and farms.

Blastomycosis infections are prevalent in locations near water, including the Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri and Tennessee River basins. The infection is seen most often in large breed male dogs, and especially in hunting dogs, sporting breeds and dogs that spend a lot of time in environments where the mold exists.

Female dogs can also be susceptible, of course, along with cats. Studies indicate most pets who acquire a blastomycosis infection live within a quarter mile of a body of water. Watch the following video for more information on this serious fungal infection, including methods of transmission, symptoms and treatment options:

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Sources and References

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