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## **Household Mold Doubles Kids' Asthma Risk**

A Moldy Smell Is Enough to Trigger Increased Risk, Study Shows

by By Miranda Hitti, WebMD Medical News

Mar. 4, 2005 -- Kids' asthma risk more than doubles if their homes smell of mold, says a new study.

"This study is important for families everywhere," says Jim Burkhardt, PhD, in a news release. Burkhardt is the science editor for *Environmental Health Perspectives*, which published the study in its March issue.

"Anyone with young children in the home should be aware of the potentially harmful effects of long-term exposure to mold and this potential link to asthma in children," he continues, in the news release.

Mold has been linked to asthma before. So have other irritants such as cigarette smoke, dust mites, and furry or feathery pets. A family history of asthma or hay fever give children genes that raises a kids' risk of being susceptible to environmental triggers to asthma, say the researchers.

You don't have to see mold for it to cause problems. The smell alone can be bad enough, the research shows.

### **Stamp Out Dampness, Mold**

Household mold odor increased kids' asthma risk about 2.5 times, according to the study. No connection was seen between asthma and homes' visible mold, water damage, or the presence of moisture, like wet spots in the home.

Still, damp dwellings can be troublesome, and not just from an architectural perspective. Mold contains allergens, which can trigger hay fever or asthma in sensitive people. They also produce a musty odor that can cause irritation to the nose, eyes, and throat.

Dampness could foster dust mites, mold, and other breathing hazards, write the researchers. It could also indicate ventilation problems that allow indoor pollutants to build up, they add.

Getting rid of mold and moisture problems aren't always a do-it-yourself chore. Professionals can help find and fix the problem.

### **Like Parent, Like Child?**

The study focused on nearly 1,900 children living near Helsinki, Finland. While the kids were 1-7 years old, researchers watched to see who got asthma over the next six years.

The kids' parents or guardians answered asthma questionnaires and phone surveys. Topics included the child's doctor-diagnosed asthma, parental history of allergies or asthma, and potential breathing irritants in the home.

The adults were also asked if their home had ever smelled moldy during the past year. The homes' record of visible mold, moisture problems, or water damage was also noted.

The study also showed that kids are more likely to get asthma if their parents had asthma or allergies.

Asthma risk soared 54% in kids whose parents had allergies or asthma, even in homes that didn't smell moldy.

The presence of moldy odor in the home more than doubled the risk of a child developing asthma over the next several years.

"The results provide further evidence that exposure to molds increases the risk of developing asthma in children," write professor Jouni Jaakkola, MD, DSc, PhD, and colleagues. Jaakola directs the Institute for Occupational and Environmental Medicine at England's University of Birmingham, and also works at Finland's University of Helsinki.

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SOURCES: Jaakkola, J. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, March 2005; vol 113: pp 357-361. News release, *Environmental Health Perspectives*.