



HEALTHY SCHOOLS NETWORK, INC.

Mold and Dampness in Schools: Using the NIOSH Dampness and Mold Assessment Tool

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What is NIOSH?

NIOSH is the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. Its mission is to develop new knowledge in the field of occupational safety and health and to transfer that knowledge into practice. It does not regulate as the Occupational Safety Administration (OSHA) does, but it does conduct studies of workplace hazards and employee exposures.

There is no national institute or federal agency or state agency that addresses children's environmental health and safety when they are away from home, that is, when they are at school or in childcare.

What are molds?

Molds are a natural part of the environment and can be found almost anywhere that moisture and oxygen are present; molds need moisture and organic matter to reproduce. They belong to the kingdom Fungi and live in moist places such as soil, plants, and dead or decaying matter (wood, cardboard, rugs, curtains, wallboard, books, papers, etc.). There is no such thing as a mold-free building.

Why be concerned about mold in schools?

1. Health

“WHO (the World Health Organization) is concerned about [damp indoor environments] because excessive dampness and mould are a threat to health. Occupants of damp or mouldy buildings are at increased risk of experiencing health problems such as respiratory symptoms, respiratory infections, allergic rhinitis and asthma.” World Health Organization brochure *“Damp and Mould: Health risks, prevention, and remedial actions,”* 2009. See http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/78636/Damp_Mould_Brochure.pdf.

Research by NIOSH related to the development of the NIOSH Assessment Tool showed that “School dampness conditions may negatively affect student academic performance.” NIOSH presentation to MIAQC Convention, 2011, by Ju-Hyeong Park, ScD, MPH, CIH and Michelle R. Martin, MS.

The US Environmental Protection Agency says health risks associated with indoor mold growth include sneezing, runny noses, red eyes, skin rashes, dizziness, headaches, and [asthma attacks](https://www.epa.gov/mold/what-are-molds). See <https://www.epa.gov/mold/what-are-molds>.

Children are uniquely vulnerable to environmental health hazards (AAP, EPA, CDC, WHO) and are *required to attend school*, but no laws protect children or even school personnel from exposure to molds or other problems caused by uncontrolled amounts of moisture.

2. Building damage

Molds “colonize” or grow and infest the surfaces they land on; they then throw out enzymes to “digest” or feed on the building materials. This is the natural process of rot of organic materials. As molds eat building materials, the gradual destruction of materials leads to expensive repairs or loss of a building’s structural integrity. See <https://www.epa.gov/mold/what-are-molds>.

Should you test your school for mold? NO.

Testing buildings for mold is time consuming, expensive, and unreliable. No “safe” levels or types of molds have been established. The time and money spent on testing can be better spent on cleanup and repairs.

Why use the NIOSH Assessment Tool?

The NIOSH Assessment Tool can be used with minimal training by school personnel and others already in or familiar with the school building. The tool is consistent and reliable and it takes very little time, so it’s very inexpensive.

Read the NIOSH Guide and Tools for School Buildings at <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2019-114/pdfs/2019-114-508.pdf?id=10.26616/NIOSH PUB2019114>.

No excess moisture = No excess mold

**Using the NIOSH Mold Assessment Tool, you can find
and address mold and moisture problems.**

Please support your school district’s facility cleaning and maintenance budget.

Say thank you when your school makes repairs and works to keep the building healthy and safe.

Credit:

This guide to the NIOSH Mold Assessment Tool was developed for Healthy Schools Network by Virginia Mott of Maine, a teacher and past president of the Maine PTA. As a school environment consultant, she participated in beta testing the NIOSH Tool.