

Mold Harms Babies

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Mold May Lead to Croup in Infants

Respiratory Problems Linked to Early Fungus Exposure

By Jean Lerche Davis
WebMD Medical News Archive
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Babies growing up in damp homes where mold and mildew are present develop more respiratory illnesses such as croup, pneumonia, and bronchitis.

The finding appears in the July issue of the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*.

Damp living conditions have long been linked with children's lower respiratory problems. But the role of mold and mildew in the home has never been clear, writes lead researcher Paul C. Stark, PhD, a professor of environmental health with Harvard University School of Public Health.

It's an important issue, since young children with respiratory infections have significantly worse problems later on, he writes. Children's immune systems develop in the first year of life.

In their study, investigators followed 499 infants during their first year -- all children of parents with asthma and allergies. Every two months, a researcher checked with the child's caregiver to see if there had been pneumonia, croup, bronchitis, or other respiratory problems.

Mold and air samples were taken from each home throughout the study. Researchers found that 324 homes had high levels of more than one type of fungi.

When factored with other environmental information, such as number of siblings, whether siblings attended daycare, water damage in the home, and number of units in their building, they found that children in homes with the most fungi -- mold, mildew, or water damage -- had an 86% higher risk of developing upper respiratory infections in the first year.

Those children who did not wheeze but had respiratory problems were most affected by household fungus. For non-wheezing children, their sensitivity to fungus is likely not an allergy but an inflammation of small airways that can lead to respiratory problems, Stark writes.

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Here are some simple actions you can take to reduce energy costs, improve comfort, and reduce air pollution in your home or other building:

1. Use a powered exhaust system on any device that burns fuel indoors.
2. Eliminate the need for air leakage through your home's building envelope by using [mechanical ventilation](#) to supply as much fresh filtered air as you want.
3. [Seal air leaks](#) in the building's envelope to block entry of microbes, allergens, toxins, irritants, insects, and cold drafts.
4. [Insulate the walls and attic](#) as much, or more than, recommended for your local climate.
5. [Control indoor air pressure](#) to:
 - a) Minimize entry of radon and water vapor from the soil.
 - b) Keep insulation effective and mold-free by minimizing leakage of moist air through walls and attics that have been cooled by winter weather..

These actions will make your home a [safer shelter](#) if an accident, or a terrorist, releases chemical, biological or radiological substances upwind of your home.

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Please send your suggestions, comments, and questions to Jon Traudt (jtraudt@tconl.com)