Has Your House Got It In For You?

Feeling a little under the weather when you wake up? Do you put it down to the fact that you have had a hard night on the tiles partying out in Patong or one of the plethora of nightlife places around Phuket? Or do you feel you are just getting older and can't keep up the cracking pace anymore?

Maybe it has nothing at all to do with any of the above although all that doesn't really help you either. Maybe it is something a little more insidious and slow acting. What I am getting at is most houses I have seen in the tropics have mould (mold in the US) in one form or another. Many people still don't fully understand the health hazards of fungal exposure. The term toxic mould is somewhat misleading as it exudes an idea that certain moulds are toxic, when actually certain types of moulds produce secondary metabolites that produce toxins. The correct term is mycotoxins.

Airborne mycotoxins from can definitely destroy one's health. Sometimes, people are unaware that they are breathing mould spores and mycotoxins until they are very sick.

This came to light recently for me when a colleague returned to the UK after many months living on Phuket. While he was here he was having constant troubles with his stomach and put it down to the change of food and hectic lifestyle he was leading. On returning to the UK he had no more stomach problems. He didn't give it a second thought until he arrived back recently and the same symptoms started appearing again. The change this time was he wasn't pursuing the same lifestyle as previously so it had to be something else. After a bit of research he came upon an article about the detrimental effect of fungal spores on human health.

Figuring this was something to look into he checked his new house for any sign of the offending mould. Lo and behold when he pulled his bed away from the wall he noticed a buildup of mould on the back of the headboard. He was virtually inhaling mould spores whenever he slept.

Moulds come in thousands of different varieties and most people will have only minor allergic reactions to the non-toxic mould and once they leave the affected area they most likely recover with few serious side effects.

However, if they have been exposed to the dangerous moulds such as Stachybotrys or Chaetomium, they could suffer from a myriad of serious symptoms and illnesses such as chronic bronchitis, learning disabilities, mental deficiencies, heart problems, cancer, multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue, lupus, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple chemical sensitivity, and bleeding lungs.

But if that isn't enough, it just keeps getting better.

Other serious symptoms of mould infestation can be respiratory problems (wheezing and difficulty to breath), nasal and sinus congestion, eye irritation (burning, watery, red, blurry vision, and light sensitivity), dry, hacking coughs, sore throats, nose and throat irritation, shortness of breath, central nervous system problems (headaches, memory problems, and mood swings), dizziness, flu-like symptoms, acid reflux, aches and pains, possible fevers and even excessive bruising. Long term effects can change inhabitants moods, and make them lethargic. Is all this starting to sound familiar? And all along you thought it was the effects of alcohol consumption.

Common ailments from toxigenic mould usually can be treated and reduced after people leave their contaminated environment. Often medication, diet, and other treatment protocols are necessary. But other health problems may remain permanently, such as brain damage and weakened immune systems. Eyesight, memory, coordination/balance, and hearing are generally the most common residual effects that often do not improve after treatment in most cases.

Moulds can be found wherever there is moisture, oxygen, and something to feed on. The worst place that moulds can grow, however, is inside wall cavities and flooring of our homes, wherever there may be cellulose materials they can feed on, such as wood, ceiling tiles, or plasterboard, even if they are not visible, and they have sustained water damage at one time or another. This is very common if there has been a plumbing leak or an inadequate roof.

Depending on the species, these microbes will grow just about anywhere. Not even a fire in excess of 500 degrees Fahrenheit has been able to destroy some moulds such as Stachybotrys. Mould requires a compatible temperature for each species. Environmental factors (temperature, nitrogen, oxygen, etc.) are necessary compounds for indoor moulds to thrive.

The mycotoxins, which are also neurotoxins (a toxin that is determined to cause neurological damage), most commonly reach people from the air, via spores from the moulds in question. They are also found in small particulates at times which may often represent mould dust, small particles of mould that has dried and turned to dust. Spores, when inhaled, can begin to colonize in the sinuses and throughout the body, including the brain, lung and gut after a period of time.

The disturbing factor about airborne mycotoxins is that it is impossible to know how much damage they have caused to one's health until it is too late.

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