Children's Health

Health Risks Lurking Beneath The Surface

(NAPSA)—Learning more about the air quality in schools may help make learning a more healthful experience for your child.

By the time a child graduates from high school, he or she has spent at least 14,000 hours breathing the air inside school buildings, and, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), that air isn't always clean.

More than 20 percent of the nation's public schools have identified and reported problems with indoor air quality (IAQ), representing an exposure population of more than 8.4 million students.

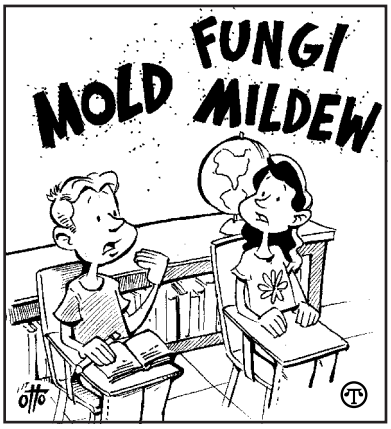
More than half of those reported IAQ problems have been linked to mold and mildew infestation.

Certain molds in high concentrations on surfaces or in the air in occupied buildings are very dangerous—and can grow and spread very quickly, making teachers, employees and students sick. Symptoms can range from mild to serious and include chronic fatigue, loss of balance and memory, irritability, difficulty speaking, eye and throat irritation, allergic reactions, asthma, sinus infections, headaches, postnasal drip and coughing. Children can be even more susceptible to mold-related illnesses than adults since their lungs and organs are still developing.

For example, at a high school in the Bronx, N.Y, area, staff and students had been experiencing shortness of breath and one teacher was hospitalized with severe bronchitis.

Some teachers suspected that the problems were related to lack of fresh air in rooms located below ground level, but tests conducted by an independent industrial hygienist showed the flow of air from the ventilation system was adequate. The hygienist did find, however, that a large quantity of mold had developed on some pipe insulation.

Building materials such as sheet rock, ceiling tiles and pipe insulation serve as the perfect breeding ground for mold spores.



When these materials become wet enough, and colonization has occurred, some fungi can carry adequate water to other parts of the building, and the contamination can spread well beyond the initially wet area.

The best way to stop mold and mildew growth is to control moisture. Experts recommend that less emphasis be placed on initial cost and more be put on installing a 100 percent non-absorptive insulation. In most environments, once pipe insulation becomes wet, it's likely that it will never completely dry out. Because water is an excellent conductor of heat, moisture in a permeable insulation transforms your insulation into a thermal conductor. This opens the door for additional problems including dripping pipes that damage ceiling systems, walls, floors, equipment, and/or furnishings. This initiates the growth of mold and mildew and the potential for associated health problems and economic losses.

When mold is cleared from the building, many of the sick usually become better, but the clean-ups can cost up to $5 million and shut down schools for weeks and even months, creating headaches for the community and increasing taxes.

For more information about the dangers of mold and mildew in schools and for tips on prevention, visit www.sickinsulation.com.