

Mould causing illnesses

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By Bob Mitchell

Can mould in walls cause problems for children?

PEEL/HALTON BUREAU CHIEF

She had dark circles under her eyes, hard white nodules on her eyelids and she hacked and gasped for breath.

Jane Laughlin didn't recognize her daughter Taylor.

``Her state of health was hideous. She had no energy,'' Laughlin says. ``She was irritable. She looked like she needed to be put to bed for six months.''

Today, the Oakville 10-year-old is healthy, showing no signs of her illness last winter, when she was taking classes in a portable at Pilgrim Woods Public School.

That portable was among 157 system because of stachybotrys stachybotrys atra. The blackmould lurked beneath the portable's ceiling tiles and behind walls adorned with drawings of flowers and stick people.

Some medical officials, environmental engineers and building scientists have linked mould exposure to everything from migraines, nosema, fatigue, rashes and diarrhea. A new U.S. study even says exposure may cause learning difficulties in some children.

But there is no definitive answer.

``There is no conclusive evidence to date suggesting a cause-and-effect relationship between airborne exposure to stachybotrys atra and illness in school-age children or adults,'' says Dr. Barbara Kawa, Peel's medical officer of health.

But engineers and scientists studying mould say enough evidence exists to say enough evidence exists to suggest students in some of Ontario's 10,000 portable classrooms are breathing the potentially harmful toxins carried by mould spores.

CAPTIONS:

BETTER NOW:

Jane Laughlin says her 10-year-old daughter Taylor's health was `hideous' last year when she was taking classes in mouldy portable.

PETER POWER/TORONTO STAR

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