

## Halton public board steps up mould search

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By Bob Mitchell

Fungus could close

half of portables,

medical officer says

STAFF REPORTER

Operation Target Mould is under way in Halton Region.

By the end of the year, one out of every two portables in the public school system could be closed because of the presence of a potentially harmful mould, health officials say.

``We don't know what we'll find but I think there is, in all likelihood, the possibility that over 50 per cent of the portables inspected will have to be closed and upgraded,'' said Dr. Robert Nosal, Halton's medical officer of health.

``Our past experience is that if there is a little mould, then you have to start digging further. When you start removing the ceiling tiles and looking behind the walls, you're likely to find more.''

In an extraordinary move last week, Nosal issued a community health protection order to the Halton District School Board, demanding that all 186 portables in the public board be inspected.

Nosal wasn't happy with the speed at which the public board had been examining its portables since excessive mould was discovered in portables at Brookdale and Pinegrove public schools in Febru-

ary.

The most recent inspections began on the weekend at Oakville's Montclair Public School. Today, a team of environmental experts and health officials will start examining the eight portables at Oakville's Pilgrim Wood Public School.

Later in the week, six portables at Sheridan Public School in Oakville will be probed.

Students will be removed from the portables and classes will be taught inside the building. If excessive mould is discovered, the classrooms will be closed and students won't be allowed back until the mould is removed.

Exposure over a prolonged period could cause respiratory problems

The fungus, known as *stachybotrys atra*, has been blamed for sore eyes and throat, headaches, nosebleeds, rashes, asthma, runny nose and fatigue.

Significant exposure to mould spores over a prolonged period of time, such as a school year, could affect a student's respiratory system, causing irritation or allergic reactions.

No Halton student has been confirmed ill as a result of the toxic mould.

The board, which must inspect 157 portables from now until the end of June, has been authorized to spend up to \$3,000 per portable, but no money has been authorized to repair the portables, which must be dismantled and rebuilt when mould is discovered.

About 200 students from Brookdale and Pinegrove have been taking classes inside their school buildings since February, when massive quantities of the fungus were discovered in several portables. Five Pinegrove portables have been upgraded, but students have yet to be allowed back into their classroom. Work still needs to be completed at many of the 10 Brookdale portables.

Four portables have been closed at Abbey Lane Public School. A preliminary examination has determined that some mould has also been discovered in portables at Rolling Meadows, Kilbride, Sheridan, John T. Tuck, C. H. Horton and River Oaks public schools.

Students remain in those classrooms, but will be immediately removed if the new inspection finds excessive mould.

Mould has also been found in 18 of 26 portables suspected of having the fungus in the Halton District Catholic School Board. Nosal did not issue a health protection order to the Catholic board because he was satisfied with the way it has been conducting inspections.

Public board officials said the delay in examining their portables was caused because they tried to do the work on weekends, but weren't able to complete the work as quickly as they hoped.

Physicians in Halton and those at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and Chedoke-McMaster Hospital in Hamilton have been told to contact Nosal if any child is diagnosed with a mould-related illness.

CAPTIONS:

DEREK OLIVER FOR THE TORONTO STAR

MOULD SEARCH:

Site supervisor Dan Foley, in full protective clothing, probes one of several portables behind Montclair Public School in Oakville Saturday for toxic mould.

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