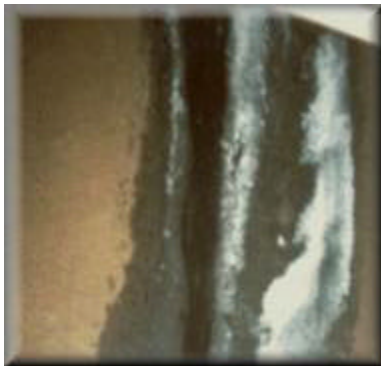




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Deadly Fungus A Growing Problem



Stachybotrys atra, a black mold, typically grows on damp, water-damaged surfaces.

In the past four years, 34 infants in Cleveland, OH, have contracted a serious, mysterious illness that caused their lungs to bleed. At least ten have died. The illness, pulmonary hemosiderosis, is caused by a black mold called *Stachybotrys atra*, which can grow in homes where there has been water damage from flooding, plumbing or roof leaks. The fungus thrives in the water-soaked cellulose fibers in building materials such as insulation, gypsum board and ceiling tile.

"The spores of this fungus contain very potent mycotoxins - toxins produced by fungi - which appear to be particularly toxic to the rapidly growing lungs of young infants," explained Dr. Dorr G. Dearborn, Ph.D., M.D., of the [Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine](#) in Cleveland. Dr. Dearborn, who is in the medical school's pediatric pulmonary division, is conducting a study with infant mice to better understand how the fungus causes the lungs to hemorrhage.

The study, funded by a grant from the [National Institute of Health's Institute of Environmental Sciences](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), will use mice of differing ages in controlled experiments that can't be done on human infants. "Since secondary stress from environmental tobacco smoke seems to be involved in the triggering of the overt hemorrhage of the human infants, we'll also look at this and similar variables," added Dr. Dearborn.

Twenty-eight of the 34 Cleveland cases occurred in a seven zip code cluster on the city's East Side. And the

problem is growing. "Concern that there may be a larger number of undetected young infants with this disorder led to the examination of all infant coroner cases over the past three years," Dr. Dearborn said. "This revealed six sudden infant death syndrome cases with evidence of preexisting major pulmonary bleeding - cases in addition the 28 patients seen at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital."

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Dr. Dearborn also thinks the disorder probably extends beyond Cleveland. He is working with the CDC's Ruth Etzel, M.D., Ph.D., to survey the nation's pediatric pulmonary centers. In the last four years they have identified more than 60 similar cases of lung hemorrhage in infants across the country.

To help reduce the risk of *Stachybotrys atra* infection, Case Western School of Medicine recommends immediate correction of all water leaks, followed by a clean-up of mold growth with a solution of one cup of chlorine bleach solution in a gallon of water. A little soap will also help to remove dirt and oil that may adhere the mold to the affected surface. If mold growth covers a large area, the situation should be assessed by the local health department prior to cleanup. 🌍

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