Summary of 2004 IOM Report: *Damp Indoor Spaces and Health*

In 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) asked the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to review all scientific studies to date about the possible connection between damp or moldy indoor places and problems with breathing or allergies. In its report *Damp Indoor Spaces and Health*, released in May 2004, IOM concluded the following:

- The growth of some bacteria (germs) and molds is one effect of indoor dampness. Damp indoor environments also benefit house dust mites. Standing water supports cockroach and rodent (rats and mice) problems as well. Too much moisture may cause toxic chemicals to be released from building materials and furnishings.

- Mold spores are found in indoor air and on surfaces and materials. No indoor space is free of them.

- Damp indoor spaces may also allow the growth of bacteria that can cause negative health effects.

- Controlling moisture is the main way to control indoor mold growth.

After reviewing the studies, IOM determined that potential health effects of exposure to either damp indoor environments or to mold indoors could be classified in one of three ways: 1) "sufficient evidence of an association" between the exposure and the health effect, 2) "limited or suggestive evidence" of an association, or 3) "inadequate or insufficient information" to determine if an association exists. The following tables summarize these findings. The full report can be read here.

Table 1. Evidence supporting an association between exposure to damp indoor environments and certain health effects.

Sufficient evidence	**Limited or suggestive evidence**	**Inadequate or insufficient information**
• upper respiratory tract (nasal and throat) symptoms • cough • wheeze • asthma symptoms in sensitized asthmatic persons	• shortness of breath • respiratory illness in otherwise healthy children • development of asthma in susceptible persons	a variety of other health outcomes, including acute idiopathic pulmonary hemorrhage in infants

Table 2. Evidence supporting an association between the presence of mold (otherwise unspecified) indoors and certain health effects.

Sufficient evidence	Limited or suggestive evidence	Inadequate or insufficient information
• upper respiratory symptoms • cough • wheeze • asthma symptoms in sensitized asthmatic persons • hypersensitivity pneumonitis (a relatively rare immune-mediated condition) in susceptible persons	respiratory illness in otherwise healthy children	a variety of other health outcomes, including acute idiopathic pulmonary hemorrhage in infants