Black Mold at Indiana University

Stachybotrys chartarum, also known as Black Mold, is a fungus that appears indoors and outdoors. Outdoors, it can appear in soil or plant debris. Indoors, it grows in places, usually not visible, with constant moisture. At Indiana University Bloomington, Black Mold has recently become a problem within dormitories. It is forcing entire residence halls to be shut down and remodeled, costing thousands of dollars. The Black Mold at Indiana University is a health threat to students living in dorms and it is a huge burden for IU in terms of money and new students coming to the university.

There are numerous other effects to Black Mold. The conflict with it and Indiana University seems like a never-ending domino effect. A constant “one thing leads to another.” It all begins within the dorms. Where does it grow? Why is it there? The black mold is prone to grow in older buildings with air conditioning. The air conditioning creates condensation and a constant moisture within a specific room (or building) leading to the spread of the harmful fungus. As of 2019, residence halls at Indiana University Bloomington are closed due to black mold: Foster and McNutt. The original plans for these dorms to be renovated were in 2021 and 2023. However, as many mold cases were reported, forcing hundreds of students to be relocated, the renovations were accelerated to after the Spring 2019 semester. Both of these residence halls were built in the early 1960’s and were found with mold in the early 2018-2019 school year.
Over 2,000 students were moved to temporary housing off campus because of black mold. (IndyStar) Unfortunately, there aren’t many ways to prevent back mold without constant cleaning. Not many college students have the time or money to clean their dorms in-and-out frequently. At IU and many other universities, black mold is basically inevitable after a dorm has been present long enough.

What exactly is the cost of treating black mold at IU? “Renovations to Foster and McNutt dorms will cost a total of $56 million” (IndyStar). Not only did the university have to pay for the renovations, they also had to pay a total compensation of $7.3 million to the students who were affected by the mold. (Indiana Daily Student) The renovations of these residence halls with require heating and air replacement and new air ducts in every individual room. When it comes to bigger facilities, like residence halls, replacement of certain appliances is necessary because there is no way to prove if the mold is elsewhere in the building. Not only that but cleaning black mold and eliminating it completely is a difficult and lengthy process. Even for a university, $56 million is a lot of money. It is a lot of money to be spending on a fungus rather than improving other areas of campus. Because they are being renovated, these residence halls are out of service for an entire year. Indiana University was also sued by multiple students for their poor handling of the situation in the 2018-2019 school year. However, they escaped the suit because they are not “contractually obligated to provide clean, safe or mold-free housing to its students, attorneys representing the university’s Board of Trustees have argued in a court filing (Indiana Daily Student).” A thought that likely went through the minds of authorities at IU was “Will our attendance rate decrease because of this?” or “How will we house all the incoming freshmen?” Well, no, the lack of 2 residence halls did not decrease the number of incoming freshmen. The class of 2023 contains approximately 8,200 students (a relatively large freshman class), so how
can IU house all of them? Well, some students, instead of having their own dorm with a roommate, live in a lounge within the residence halls with bunk beds for 6. At the beginning, there was certainly an overcrowding situation because of the mold. Now, since some students have either dropped out or transferred to other universities, the students in the lounges were able to move to available rooms.

Not only is black mold a concern for its cost to treat it, but also it poses a threat to the health of anyone exposed to it. Sometimes it is even called “toxic mold.” It has a number of effects to a person’s health that are respiratory such as coughing, sneezing, mucus membranes of the nose and throat (HGTV). If exposed long enough, symptoms can also include nausea, vomiting, nose bleeds, internal bleeding (lungs), or even death from shutting down one’s organs. No student expects to experience these symptoms while pursuing an education in their first year of college. These effects could interfere with the student’s grades or their ability to study or attend class. Black mold is very difficult to prevent in a giant facility like a residence hall with college students on the inside who aren’t worried about the threats of the fungus. Not only could they get sick, they could die if they don’t realize its present. Indiana University parents seemed to be more concerned about the health effects than the university. One parent on the Indiana Daily Student article wrote: “I cannot believe IU actually has the opinion above as stated by their attorney. This very serious health issue should not be taken lightly nor dismissed smugly by attorneys implying IU is above the law when providing housing.” The students who were exposed to the mold were also unhappy with the situation when they realized their health was at risk. “The interviewee does not feel that the ultimate response was adequate because s/he, along with many other people in the building, is still experiencing severe allergic reactions to mold,” the report says (Indiana Daily Student).
With all the threats of black mold, there are only a few ways a college student can prevent it. As established earlier, “toxic black mold needs materials high in cellulose and low in nitrogen to grow on. This means toxic black mold can grow on many common indoor building materials.” (Moldpedia) Within all universities, especially Indiana University, students don’t have much time on their hands aside from doing homework, going to class, playing sports, or participating in other extracurriculars. The average student might ask, “How can I prevent black mold when I have very little time on my hands?” Well, in this kind of situation, inspection is key. With a few one-time, quick jobs, students can prevent black mold to the best of their abilities. The main idea of these jobs is to keep all areas of the dorm dry. Of course, living in the Midwest, moisture is always in the air. Therefore, students should make sure there is adequate air flow and ventilation so that even if something is wet, it can dry up eventually. Another might ask, “If black mold is only growing in some residence halls, does that mean it’s the students who are causing it?” This question is difficult to answer correctly because there are valid answers that come with valid details. On the affirmative side, yes, black mold is only appearing in some dorms and some rooms. The students may be creating a constant moisture in the air that causes the fungus to grow. But there is no way of knowing this. On the other hand, black mold is going to happen in buildings like residence halls. Some students are lazy, but they should not be blamed for causing black mold. From what I have learned from various sources, the mold is a result of the older buildings in combination with poor air conditioning units and air ducts. Mold is most definitely present at Indiana University Bloomington and it is most definitely a threat to the students, the university, and the university’s money. Indiana University needs to find a solution to the problem, or it will continue to affect them negatively in multiple ways such as decreased attendance, major costs, and decreased reputation. Whether it is caused by the
university’s poor appliances, the students’ lack of cleaning, or it is a natural effect, it needs to be assessed more thoroughly by Indiana University.
Works Cited:


