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HOWARD COUNTY

Mold found in 35 Howard County public schools in past 11 months

By Jake Boarts
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Mold was found in 35 Howard County public schools during the 2018-19 academic year, with a range of growth samples found on drywall in the cinder blocks of athletic bathrooms.

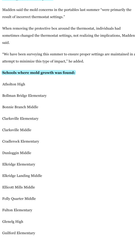
The reports were made between January and June, according to the school system's Indoor Environmental Quality webpage. The school system said all of the cases have been remediated.

In addition to receiving reports from the 77 schools in the district, the school system also monitors administrative buildings, including the central office, custodial services, ground services, Isaac Gross, Jr. Educational Center, Thurmont Tillman Infoblogs, logistics, Old Bushy Park and Old Cedar Lane, according to the page. No cases of mold were found in any of the additional buildings.

In some cases, complaints were filed because of the concern of potential mold and then, upon investigation, nothing was found.

"Last year's weather pattern had a large impact on the number of mold occurrences," Chris Mashburn, the school system's Indoor Environmental Quality manager, said in an email.

"The weather was extremely humid, and that moisture can make its way into the building through a variety of channels."



Mold found in cinder cinder blocks during the year of 2018-19.

Its peak, 23, Howard schools were found to have higher mold levels than expected.

Concerns about mold were first raised in summer 2019 after teachers and students said they felt sick after being inside Glenwood Middle School. At the time, the school system's remediation procedures were under fire by parents, teachers and some elected officials, including Del. Larry Hogan.

Potential health effects associated with mold exposure include asthma, allergic reactions and other respiratory complaints, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Mold exposure can result in irritation to the eyes, nose, throat, lungs and skin in anyone, not just those allergic to mold.

On the Indoor Environmental Quality webpage, parents, teachers, administrative staff and others can submit concerns, view reports of environmental issues in schools and see lease issues were remediated. The school system's Office of Environment contacts each individual who submits a concern and performs an environmental assessment of the reported area.

The webpage, which "provides greater transparency," was launched in August, Mashburn said.

The Indoor Environmental Quality program conducts two walk-through reviews of each Howard school every year. One walk-through is performed by Howard schools staff members, parents and community members trained by the Office of Environment. This group is trained to identify and report "potential indoor environmental issues," according to the Indoor Environmental Quality webpage.

A school system industrial hygienist, who assesses each school building including cavities, above dropped ceilings and mechanical equipment, conducts the second walk-through.

The walk-through processes are based on the Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality recommendations for schools, according to the school system.

Many complaints in the 2018-19 academic year were filed for various school gyms and athletic storage closets.

Howard schools OK'd wages to speed more into with Kendig, district looking to fill the position.

In an outdoor athletic storage closet at Elkridge Landing Middle, mold growth was discovered on the baseboard of both sides and on the tape of field hockey sticks, according to the report.

Volleyballs were found with mold on them in Ellicott Mills Middle's gym storage closet. At Lime Kiln Middle, mold was found on gym mats in a gym storage closet and in a corner of a gym closet at Guilford Elementary.

Mold was found in the dresser area — and used by students — of the boys locker room at River Hill High, as well as on the cleo straps of athletic helmets in the school's outdoor storage area.

In numerous other cases, mold growth was found in the school's portable classrooms, including on walls, ceilings, on air vent, in drywall and on carpets, according to various complaints.

Mashburn said the mold concerns in the portables last summer "were primarily the result of incorrect thermostat settings."

When returning the protective hose around the thermostat, individuals had sometimes changed the thermostat settings, not realizing the implications, Mashburn said.

"We have been surveying this summer to ensure proper settings are maintained in an attempt to minimize this type of impact," he added.

Schools where mold growth was found:

Atholton High

Bollman Bridge Elementary

Bonnie Branch Middle

Charlesville Elementary

Clarksville Middle

Cradlerock Elementary

Dasburgh Middle

Elkridge Elementary

Elkridge Landing Middle

Ellicott Mills Middle

Folly Quarter Middle

Fulton Elementary

Glenwood Middle

Guilford Elementary

Hammond Elementary

Hammond High

Hanover-Chase Middle

Homewood

Ilchester Elementary

Laurel Woods Elementary

Lime Kiln Elementary

Lisbon Elementary

Marshall Middle

Mt. Hebron High

Mount View Middle

Northfield Elementary

Oakland Mills High

Pointers Run Elementary

River Hill High

Running Brook Elementary

Swansfield Elementary

Talbott Springs Elementary

Waverly Elementary

Wilde Lake High

Schools/offices with no mold complaints and/or no mold growth found:

Bellow Springs Elementary

Bryant Woods Elementary

Burleigh Manor Middle

Bushy Park Elementary

Cedar Lane School

Centennial High

Centennial Lane Elementary

Central office

Clemens Crossing Elementary

Custodial Services

Dayton Oaks Elementary

Deep Run Elementary

Dorsey Building

Duckett Lane Elementary

Forest Ridge Elementary

Glenwood Middle

Gorman Crossing Elementary

Ground Services

Hammond Middle

Hanover Hills Elementary

Harriet Tubman Building

Hollifield Station Elementary

Howard High

Jeffers Hill Elementary

Lake Elkhorn Middle

Logistics

Long Reach High

Longfellow Elementary

Manor Woods Elementary

Marriotts Ridge High

Murray Hill Middle

Oakland Mills Middle

Old Bushy Park

Old Cedar Lane

Patuxent Middle

Patuxent Valley Middle

Phelps Luck Elementary

Rockrose High

Rockburn Elementary

St. John's Elementary

Stevens Forest Elementary

Thomas Viaduct Middle

Thunder Hill

Triadelphia Ridge Elementary

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FOR THE RECORD
One of the schools listed without mold was incorrectly named. Marriotts Ridge High did not have instances of mold growth.

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