

## What's with the mold at some Maryland schools? 30 in Baltimore have been treated for spores since August

By Sarah Meehan

TOP NEWS VIDEOS

Record rainfall and warm weather have allowed mold to thrive in schools in Maryland and beyond, forcing the relocation of some students as classrooms and dorms are purged.

Mold led to the relocation of students at Callaway Elementary School in Northwest Baltimore from contaminated classrooms on the first floor to the second floor. And at the University of Maryland, College Park, students living in Elkton Hall were [moved to local hotels](#) after mold was found in the dorm.



Other local school officials say the summer's excessive rain paired with a late-summer heat wave has created prime growing conditions for the fungi, which thrive in warm, damp conditions.

At Callaway Elementary, one of about 30 city schools that have been treated for mold since August, facilities crews have been testing for and eradicating mold since it was discovered in the school.

"They're constantly testing and looking and observing," city schools spokeswoman Edie House Foster said.

Items damaged by mold are being removed from the building, she said.

"We understand the concerns of families, students and staff members whose school buildings may have problems with mold as a result of prolonged wet and humid weather," she said in an email. "The health and well-being of our school communities is a top priority, and we are doing everything possible to address these problems as they develop."

Facilities workers are installing dehumidifiers and insulating pipes to prevent condensation, which House Foster said is a major contributor to mold growth.

Mold spores have sprouted on carpets and elsewhere inside some Anne Arundel County Public Schools buildings, spokesman Bob Mosier said. The school system has not had to relocate students — and it's not planning on it, he said. The schools have addressed the growths as they've appeared.

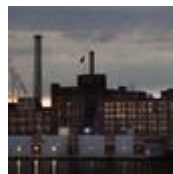
"It's an issue everywhere," Mosier said. "We're in a period of record rainfall ... and we came off of a period right at the end of the summer of record heat, and so those two things aren't helpful for any building."

The Baltimore area is pacing toward a [record year](#) for precipitation. Through Sunday, nearly 51 inches of rainfall had been recorded at Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport in 2018 — 9 inches more than the average annual total.

Keith Bock, owner of Peake Restoration Mold Testing of Anne Arundel County, has operated his residential mold remediation business for 10 years. This year has been his busiest yet — business is up 30 percent, he said, a spike he attributed to the rainy weather.

“We’re certainly seeing an increase in mold given the wet conditions,” Bock said. “I can’t keep up with the demand right now due to it.”

Mold thrives in wet, hot, humid environments, so this year’s weather has provided fertile conditions for mold to grow.



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Exposure to mold can cause coughing, itchy eyes and skin, stuffy noses and shortness of breath. People with allergies to mold and weakened immune systems can have more extreme reactions, and in some cases mold can cause people to develop asthma, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Schools in Pennsylvania, New York and Chicago have also relocated students because of mold outbreaks this year.

The recent incidents aren't the first time mold has plagued schools in Maryland.

An audit spurred by parent complaints two years ago found 12 Howard County schools had [higher mold levels](#) than expected. Since then, the school system developed an Indoor Environmental Quality webpage where the public can submit concerns, view reports regarding environmental issues in schools and see how the problems have been addressed.

At least four complaints about mold have been submitted in Howard County Public Schools since the start of the 2018 school year, and all of them have been remediated, according to the website.

"With this significant focus on identifying indoor environmental issues, responding quickly and accurately and communicating openly with our families, we have not experienced the types of concerns that we once did," Brian Bassett, a spokesman for Howard County schools, said in an email.

*Baltimore Sun reporter Scott Dance contributed to this story.*