



INTERPRETATION GUIDE

READING A MOLD LAB REPORT

Lab reports are written for laboratories, not for buyers. This guide explains what the numbers and genus names mean, so you can tell the difference between a normal result and one that needs action. **The single most important comparison is indoor versus outdoor** — not any individual number.

START HERE: THERE IS NO LEGAL “SAFE” MOLD LIMIT

No federal or Michigan standard sets a numeric threshold for airborne mold. Anyone quoting an official limit is mistaken. Interpretation is comparative: your indoor sample is judged against an outdoor control taken the same day, plus the physical evidence found in the building.

01 THE THREE SAMPLE TYPES

SAMPLE	WHAT IT TELLS YOU	LIMITS
Air (spore trap)	What is airborne right now, reported as spores per cubic meter, compared to an outdoor control	A snapshot only; results shift with weather, HVAC, and activity
Surface (tape or swab)	Whether a specific stain actually is mold and what genus is growing there	Says nothing about air quality or the extent elsewhere
Bulk / cavity	Growth on removed material, or inside a wall via a small probe hole	Somewhat invasive; needs the right access point

02 HOW TO READ THE AIR SAMPLE NUMBERS

- **Compare indoor to outdoor, genus by genus.** Indoor counts should generally be similar to or lower than outdoors.
- **Indoor lower than outdoor, similar mix** — normal. Spores came in on air and shoes.
- **Indoor much higher than outdoor** — suggests an indoor source, even if nothing is visible yet.
- **A genus present indoors but absent outdoors** is more meaningful than a big total count.
- **Watch total counts in the thousands** per cubic meter indoors when outdoor levels are low.
- **Winter outdoor counts are naturally very low** here — snow cover suppresses them, so modest indoor numbers can still stand out.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN TIMING NOTE

Season changes what “normal” looks like. An August outdoor control in Traverse City can run very high, making indoor numbers look reassuring by comparison. A February control under snow can be near zero, making an ordinary indoor result look alarming. Always read the outdoor control before reacting to the indoor number.

03 GENERA YOU'LL SEE ON NORTHERN MICHIGAN REPORTS

GENUS	WHERE IT COMES FROM	WHAT ELEVATED INDOORS SUGGESTS
Cladosporium	The most common outdoor mold here; on plants and soil	Usually normal. High indoors points to damp surfaces or condensation
Penicillium / Aspergillus	Reported together; the spores look alike. Common in damp materials	The classic water-damage marker. Elevated levels mean find the source
Basidiospores	Mushrooms and wood-decay fungi, abundant in our forests	Can indicate decaying wood in a crawl space or wet framing
Alternaria	Outdoor plant surfaces; also damp indoor spots	Common allergen. Indoors suggests a persistently damp surface
Chaetomium	Grows on wet cellulose: drywall paper, cardboard	Indicates sustained water damage, not humidity
Stachybotrys	The “black mold” of headlines. Needs long-term wet material	Points to a chronic leak; often found by surface sample
Curvularia, Epicoccum, Smuts	Outdoor vegetation and field crops	Almost always outdoor origin

ABOUT “BLACK MOLD”

Stachybotrys gets the press, but many molds are dark and color identifies nothing. CDC and EPA guidance is consistent: remove any indoor growth and correct the source, whatever the genus. A Stachybotrys result signals water sat somewhere a long time — find that water.

04 WHAT TO DO WITH THE RESULT

- ☐ **Read the narrative before the lab sheet.** Moisture readings and visible findings outweigh spore counts.
- ☐ **Identify the water source.** Remediation without correcting moisture guarantees the mold returns.
- ☐ **Scope the affected area** before pricing anything.
- ☐ **Get quotes from a remediation contractor**, not the testing company — that separation protects your client.
- ☐ **Plan post-remediation verification** after the work and before the containment comes down.
- ☐ **Keep all reports in the file** for disclosure and future reference.

FOR AGENTS: KEEPING A MOLD RESULT FROM KILLING A DEAL

Most reports describe a fixable moisture condition, not a catastrophe. The productive sequence: find the water, define the scope, price the correction, negotiate from that number. Deals die when a genus name circulates without that context — lead with cause and cost, not the lab sheet.

QUESTIONS ON A REPORT? WE'LL WALK YOU THROUGH IT.

Mold testing, moisture diagnostics, and full inspections across Northern Michigan.

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