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## 2012 Iowa Harvest Exposure to Mold and Dust in Grain

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## **Abstract**

Grain dust is always a health concern for Iowa farmers and those working in the grain industry. Drought conditions this year may elevate human and animal health concerns because of increased dust and mold exposure. The Iowa Department of Public Health has issued [2012 Iowa Harvest Exposure to Mold and Dust in Grain](#), a fact sheet covering the following information.

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### 2012 Iowa Harvest Exposure to Mold and Dust in Grain

By Chuck Schwab, Department of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering

Grain dust is always a health concern for Iowa farmers and those working in the grain industry. Drought conditions this year may elevate human and animal health concerns because of increased dust and mold exposure. The Iowa Department of Public Health has issued [2012 Iowa Harvest Exposure to Mold and Dust in Grain](#), a fact sheet covering the following information.

The drought has created conditions favorable for an increase in dust and the production of aspergillus mold and associated aflatoxins. Exposure to low levels of grain dust during normal working conditions often causes reactions that are a nuisance, such as a cough, sore throat, nose and eye irritation, or feeling stuffed up or congested. People with chronic breathing problems or asthma may experience more symptoms or asthma attacks when exposed to high dust and mold levels.

Exposures to moldy and dusty grain, especially large exposures, may also cause two specific medical conditions with similar symptoms:

1. Farmer's Lung or Hypersensitivity Pneumonitis (FHP) – a fairly uncommon condition (one in 20 farmers) caused by a delayed allergic reaction to the dust. Repeated exposures can lead to permanent lung damage or limitations to work. A medical provider should be consulted.
2. Organic Dust Toxic Syndrome (ODTS) – a more common toxic response to dust, molds, bacteria, or toxins in the grain dust. Recovery is usually in a few days, but a medical provider should be consulted.

Common symptoms include cough, headache, chest tightness, muscle aches, fever or generally not feeling well. If you have any of these symptoms, see your medical provider.

#### What you can do to protect yourself during harvest

- Avoid direct exposures to dust whenever possible.
- When working in extremely dusty conditions use a NIOSH-approved and certified "N-95" respirator that fits you properly. HOWEVER, consult your medical provider before using a respirator. Individuals with heart and lung conditions or other respiratory limitations should not use a respirator. N-95 respirators must be used only with a clean shaven face to ensure proper fit.
- People with chronic respiratory health issues should avoid dust exposure.
- If you have been exposed to large amounts of dust and you begin to feel ill, you should contact your medical provider for a proper medical

evaluation.

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