Potted Plant Fungal Spore Shedding. V. SMITH*, A. STREIFEL, F.S. RHAME, B. JUNL. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Potted plants (PP) taken from hospital patient rooms were evaluated for their contribution to ambient airborne spore levels. In a HEPA clean room, a high volume Cassella/London slit sampler connected to a sealed 0.2 m³ box with a HEPA-filtered inlet was used to sample 3.5 m³ (5 minute samples) of evacuated air from the box. Empty box controls were taken prior to plant sampling to establish the background spore level. A PP was placed in the box, air samples taken, and the box emptied and cleaned. Air was evacuated from the sealed box for five minutes to remove any residual spores where a control sample was taken before the box was unsealed for the next plant sample. Inhibitory Mold Agar sample plates were incubated @ 37°C for 72 hrs before evaluation.

Total fungal CFU recovered from controls was 27 CFU/63 samples (0.12 CFU/m³). PP yielded 1354 CFU/44 samples (8.6 CFU/m³). PP samples were positive for A. fumigatus at 73% compared to 25% for controls. Mean A. fumigatus recoveries were 0.9 CFU/m³ from PP and 0.09 CFU/m³ from controls. The maximum A. fumigatus recovered was 12 CFU/m³. Average yield of A. fumigatus from soil samples of PP was 4.3x10⁶ CFU/g from 41% of the PP sampled. The percentage of samples with zero CFU/plate was 5% of PP versus 75% of controls.

In very low ambient spore content air, potted plants may be a significant source of airborne fungal spores. Elimination of these fungal reservoirs in certain patient treatment areas is prudent for patient protection.

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