

# Rotten grain can make you terribly sick

By **Ritu Bhatia** in New Delhi

**THE** shame of having millions of tonnes of wheat rotting in warehouses in a country where billions are starving clearly isn't enough for the Food Corporation of India (FCI).

Now this grain, deemed unfit for human consumption, has been dumped into the market and is probably going to end up at local mills, to be ground into flour. Soon, you may be biting into a *chapatti* or slice of bread made from this flour.

Apart from a lower nutritional value, food items with constituents originating from rotten foodgrain also pose several health hazards as these grains are likely to be contaminated by insects, fungus and even rodents.

"Consuming such foodgrain could have adverse impact on someone who is allergic to a particular insect or fungus. In extreme cases it could prove toxic, leading to food poisoning or choking," Dr Honey Khanna, dietician, Max hospital, says.

Apart from bread, contaminated flour may end up in biscuits, noodles and several other confectionary items, increasing the risk it poses to consumers. "It's especially bad if these are being used in baked products as

## THE SYMPTOMS



- Running nose
- Watery eyes
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Skin inflammation and itching
- Fever
- Asthma

plenty of additives and preservatives are added during baking, which could make the rotten foodgrain toxic for consumption," Dr Khanna says.

Grains considered unfit for human consumption often make their way into pet food and agricultural feed, inducing toxicity in pets and livestock. Fungal infections, specifically mold, can be blamed for the maximum number of reactions in both humans and animals.

Fungus and mold are well-known sources of illnesses and even death,

which is why food and drug administration agencies and the agriculture industry the world over closely monitor mold levels in grains and foodstuff. Health problems associated with high levels of airborne mold spores include allergic reactions, asthma episodes, irritation of the eye, nose and throat, infections, sinus congestion, and other respiratory problems.

So, it is imperative to keep the contamination of animal feed and human food supplies below specific levels. "Mold in rotten foodgrain produces toxins called mycotoxin and aflatoxin which affect the liver and can cause jaundice. There have also been reports of people getting liver cancer due to consumption of rotten food grains," Dr M.P. Sharma, head of internal medicine, Rockland hospital, says.

Consuming products made from infected food grains may cause all sorts of allergic responses, depending upon an individual's immune system. The degree of reaction also depends upon how frequently an individual consumes the contaminated item, as well as its concentration. "Besides being toxic, the infected grain can also cause stomach infections resulting in fever, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting," nutritionist Sakshi Chawla says.