

Mold

What is mold?

Molds are forms of fungi that are present virtually everywhere, indoors and outdoors. With a simple food source such as leaves or wood, molds can grow and reproduce. Because molds grow by digesting the organic material, they gradually destroy whatever they grow on. Sometimes, new molds grow on old mold colonies. Mold growth on surfaces can often be seen in the form of discoloration, frequently green, gray, brown, or black but also white and other colors. Molds release countless tiny, lightweight spores, which travel through the air.

How am I exposed to indoor molds?

Molds are present everywhere in the environment. They grow and multiply whenever conditions are right: the combination of moisture and organic material is favorable for mold growth. Mold can grow at home, school or office where people live and/or work. Active molds produce spores, which are invisible and small enough to travel through the air and into your lungs. Mold can contaminate people when they touch contaminated materials or by eating contaminated foods.

Can mold become a problem in my home?

Molds will grow and multiply whenever conditions are right—sufficient moisture is available and organic material is present. Be on the lookout in your home for common sources of indoor moisture that may lead to mold problems: flooding, leaky roofs, sprinkler spray hitting the house, plumbing leaks, overflow from sinks or sewers, damp basement or crawl space, steam from shower or cooking, humidifiers, wet clothes drying indoors or clothes dryers exhausting indoors.

Warping floors and discoloration of walls and ceilings can be indications of moisture problems. Condensation on windows or walls is also an important indication, but it can sometimes be caused by an indoor combustion problem. Have fuel-burning appliances routinely inspected by your local utility or a professional heating contractor.

What are the health aspects of mold?

Molds produce health effects through inflammation, allergy or infection. Allergic reactions (often referred to as hay fever) are most common following mold exposure. The most common health problems from mold include:

- **Respiratory problems, such as wheezing, difficulty breathing and shortness of breath**
- **Nasal and sinus congestion**
- **Eye irritation (burning, watery, or reddened eyes)**
- **Dry, hacking cough**
- **Nose or throat irritation**
- **Skin rashes or irritation**

Exposure to mold is not healthy for anyone inside buildings. Therefore, it is always best to identify and correct high moisture conditions quickly before mold grows and health problems develop. Headaches, memory problems, mood swings, nosebleeds, fevers, body aches and pains are occasionally reported in mold cases.

Some people may have more severe symptoms or become ill more rapidly than others: individuals with existing respiratory conditions (such as allergies, chemical sensitivities, or asthma), persons with weakened immune systems (such as HIV, cancer or chemotherapy patients), infants, young children and the elderly. **If you think you have symptoms related to exposure to molds, you should see your doctor.**

How do I clean up mold in my home?

Mold can be present in a small or big area. A small area of mold surface should not be bigger than 3 feet by 3 feet. In this case, when mold is growing on places such as hard plastic, tile, wood and some drywall, can usually be cleaned by the homeowner. For other items like upholstered furniture and carpets, a wet vacuum or steam cleaner may be used on small areas. Consult a professional for larger areas of mold and for general assistance.

Here is the list to do to clean mold from your home:

- Identify and eliminate sources of moisture: leaks, insufficient air flow, etc.
- Clean and dry moldy areas – use containment of affected areas
- Bag and dispose of all material that may have moldy residues, such as rags, paper, leaves, and debris

If you decide to clean your home, you need to take the following measures of protection

- Use an N-95 particulate respirator
- Wear protective clothing that will be cleaned or discarded
- Use rubber gloves
- Ask family members or bystanders to leave during the cleaning process
- Keep the air flowing in your house during and after the cleaning process
- Mix one-half cup of bleach per gallon of water and apply to surface. A spray bottle, mop or sponge can be used
- Ventilate the area and remove excess solution.
- Allow bleach solution to remain on the area for 15 minutes to disinfect.
- Rinse and thoroughly dry the area

Mold prevention tips in your home

Inspect your home regularly for the indications and sources of indoor moisture and mold. Take steps to eliminate sources of water as quickly as possible. If a leak or flooding occurs, it is essential to act quickly.

- Keep humidity level in the home below 60%; ideally between 30 %-50%
- Use exhaust fans while cooking and showering. Make sure fans vent to the outdoors
- Ventilate and or dehumidify attics, crawl spaces and basements
- Keep bathrooms dry and well ventilated
- Clean, dry or remove anything from your home that is water damaged within 48 hours
- Watch for condensation and wet spots
- Stop the source of leak or flooding
- Remove excess water with mops or wet vacuum
- Open closet and cabinet doors and move furniture away from walls to increase circulation
- Run portable fans to increase air circulation
- Do not use the home's central blower if flooding has occurred in it or in any of the ducts
- Run dehumidifiers and window air conditioners to lower humidity
- Do not turn up the heat or use heaters in confined areas, as higher temperatures increase the rate of mold growth