

Mold Fact Sheet

Mold basics

Excess moisture, flooding and standing water contribute to the growth of mold in homes and buildings. Molds are part of the natural environment and play a part in nature by breaking down dead organic matter such as fallen leaves and dead trees. However, exposure to mold indoors can cause a variety of health problems including allergic reactions of various forms. Molds can easily be recognized by sight or smell since they usually release a bad odor, earthy smell or a foul stench.

People at greatest risk from mold

People with allergies, asthma, or other breathing conditions are more sensitive to mold. Others with weakened immune systems such as HIV and cancer patients are more susceptible to mold infections. It is advisable to seek medical attention if you or a member of your family has a history of lung disease.

Routes of exposure

Inhalation is usually presumed to be the most important mechanism of exposure to mold spores in indoor environments. Persons can also be exposed to mold through physical contact with airborne spores as well.

Possible health effects of mold exposure

Exposure to mold may cause a number of health problems. People who are allergic to mold may experience stuffy nose, irritated eyes, wheezing and skin irritation. Gradually, this may lead to difficulty in breathing and shortness of breath. Some people with chronic lung illnesses, such as obstructive lung disease, may develop infections in their lungs.

Safely removing mold

The most effective way to eliminate mold growth is to fix the moisture problem, remove mold from materials that can be cleaned and discard materials that cannot be cleaned or are physically damaged beyond use. To **clean** mold off hard household surfaces wash each item or surface with a mixture of clean hot water and detergent, scrub rough surfaces with a stiff brush, rinse with clean water and dry promptly. Finally, **clean** the surface with a diluted bleach solution (**1 cup of bleach to 1 gallon of water**) and dry the surface.

Protect yourself from mold

Hand washing is the single most important thing that you can do. Always be sure to wash hands after touching contaminated surfaces or objects before you eat or drink anything. The basic rule is, if you can see or smell mold, take steps to eliminate the excess moisture, and then cleanup and remove the mold. **It is important to remove the source of moisture before beginning to cleanup, or mold will return if the area becomes wet again.**

Additional safety guidelines for mold clean-up

- Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles when cleaning with bleach.
- Open windows and doors to get fresh air.
- Never mix bleach and ammonia because the fumes from the mixture can be fatal.
- If the area of mold growth is more than 10 square feet, consult the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guide titled *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings* . Although focused on schools and commercial buildings, this document also applies to other building types. You can get it free by calling your local Health Department or the EPA Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse at (800) 438-4318, or by going to the EPA web site at http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html

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