

## Why is mold growing in my home?

Molds are part of the natural environment. Outdoors, molds play a part in nature by breaking down dead organic matter such as fallen leaves and dead trees, but indoors, mold growth should be avoided. Molds reproduce by means of tiny spores; the spores are invisible to the naked eye and float through outdoor and indoor air. Mold may begin growing indoors when mold spores land on surfaces that are wet.

## Can mold cause health problems?

Molds has been around since before man and usually is not a problem indoors, unless mold spores land on a wet or damp spot and begin growing. Molds may cause health problems on some individuals. Molds produce substances that can cause allergic reactions, irritants, and in some cases, potentially toxic substances. Inhaling or touching mold or mold spores may cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals. Allergic responses include hay fever-type symptoms, such as sneezing, runny nose, red eyes, and skin rash. Allergic reactions to mold are common. They can be immediate or delayed. Molds can also cause asthma attacks in people with asthma who are allergic to mold. In addition, mold can irritate the eyes, skin, nose, throat, and lungs of allergic people. Symptoms other than the allergic and irritant types are not commonly reported as a result of inhaling mold. Research on mold and health effects is ongoing. This brochure provides a brief overview; it does not describe all potential health effects related to mold exposure. For more detailed information consult a health professional. You may also wish to consult your state or local health department.

## How do I get rid of mold?

It is impossible to get rid of all mold and mold spores indoors; some mold spores will be found floating through the air and in house dust. The **mold will not grow if moisture is not present**. Indoor mold growth can and should be prevented or controlled by controlling moisture indoors. If there is mold growth in your home, you must clean up the mold **and fix the water problem**. If you clean up the mold, but don't fix the water problem, then, most likely, the mold problem will come back.

If there is a water leak in your unit immediately call the manager and set up a work order to make necessary repairs.

## Who should do the cleanup?

Who should do the cleanup depends on a number of factors. One consideration is the size of the mold problem. If the moldy area is less than about 10 square feet (less than roughly a 3 ft. by 3 ft. patch), in most cases, you can handle the job yourself by **Scrubbing mold off hard surfaces with detergent and water, and dry let it dry completely.**

However:

- If there has been a lot of water damage, and/or mold growth covers more than 10 square feet, call the Housing Authority who will consult the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guide: *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial*. You can get information on mold which is available for free by calling the EPA I Clearinghouse at

(800) 438-4318, or on the internet at [epa.gov/iaq/molds/mold\\_remediation.html](http://epa.gov/iaq/molds/mold_remediation.html).

- If you suspect that the heating/ventilation or air conditioning (HVAC) system, it may be contaminated with mold before taking further action call your landlord and set up a work order. Do not run the HVAC system if you know or suspect that it is contaminated with mold - it could spread mold throughout the building.
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- If the water and/or mold damage was caused by sewage or other contaminated water, then your landlord will call in a professional who has experience cleaning and fixing buildings damaged by contaminated water.
- If you have health concerns, consult a health professional before starting cleanup.

## **MOISTURE CONTROL IS THE KEY TO MOLD CONTROL**

- Moisture control is the key to mold control, so when water leaks or spills occur indoors - **ACT QUICKLY**. If wet or damp materials or areas are dried 24-48 hours after a leak or spill happens, in most cases mold will not grow.
- Clean and repair roof gutters regularly.
- Make sure the ground slopes away from the building foundation, so that water does not enter or collect around the foundation.
- Keep air conditioning drip pans clean and the drain lines unobstructed and flowing properly.
- Keep indoor humidity low. If possible, keep indoor humidity below 60 percent (ideally between 30 and 50 percent) relative humidity. Relative humidity can be measured with a moisture or humidity meter, a small, inexpensive (\$10-\$50) instrument available at many hardware stores.
- If you see condensation or moisture collecting on windows, walls or pipes **ACT QUICKLY** to dry the wet surface and reduce the moisture/water source. Condensation can be a sign of high humidity.

### **Actions that will help to reduce humidity:**

- Appliances such as stoves and kerosene heaters produce water vapor and will increase the humidity unless vented to the outside therefore, use the stove vent hood when cooking.
- Run the bathroom fan or open the window when showering. Use exhaust fans or open windows whenever cooking, running the dishwasher or dishwashing, etc.

### **Actions that will help prevent condensation:**

- Increase ventilation or air movement by opening doors and/or windows, when practical. Use fans as needed.

- Cover cold surfaces, such as cold water pipes, with insulation.  
Increase air temperature.

## **CLEANING Tips and techniques**

The tips and techniques presented in this section will help you clean up your mold problem. Professional cleaners or remediators may use methods not covered in this publication. Please note that mold may cause staining and cosmetic damage.

- **Scrub mold off hard surfaces with detergent and water, and dry completely.**
- Absorbent or porous materials, such as ceiling tiles and carpet, may have to be thrown away if they become moldy. Mold can grow on or fill in the empty spaces and crevices of porous materials, so the mold may be difficult or impossible to remove completely.
- Do not paint or caulk moldy surfaces. Clean up the mold and dry the surfaces before painting. Paint applied over moldy surfaces is likely to peel.
- If you are unsure about how to clean an item, or if the item is expensive or of sentimental value, you may wish to consult a specialist. Specialists in furniture repair, restoration, painting, art restoration and conservation, carpet and rug cleaning, water damage, and fire or water restoration are commonly listed in phone books. Be sure to ask for and check references. Look for specialists who are affiliated with professional organizations.