



Reducing Your Exposure to Mold

Molds are small organisms found everywhere, inside and outside, including on plants, foods, and dry leaves. They can be nearly any color, including white, green, or black. Molds benefit the outdoor environment and are needed to break down dead material.

Mold spores are tiny and lightweight, and travel easily through the air. When mold spores land on damp building materials – for example, walls, floors, carpet, or furniture – they can begin to grow. When molds are present in large numbers, they may cause allergy and asthma symptoms.

WHAT ARE SOURCES OF MOISTURE IN MY HOME?

Many sources can cause moisture in your home, including –

- roof and plumbing leaks
- problems with gutters and downspouts
- damp basements
- uncovered dirt crawlspaces
- flooding and sewer backups
- leaking windows and air conditioners
- humidifiers
- clothes dryers vented indoors

HOW CAN I BE EXPOSED TO MOLD?

We are exposed to mold every day. When mold grows on a surface, spores can be released into the air where they can be easily inhaled. A person who inhales mold spores or pieces of mold may suffer adverse health effects.

WHAT HEALTH EFFECTS CAN BE CAUSED BY EXPOSURE TO MOLD?

Some people are more sensitive to molds than others, including:

- infants and children
- elderly persons
- immune-compromised persons (people with HIV infection, cancer, liver disease, etc., or who are undergoing chemotherapy)
- individuals with existing respiratory conditions, such as asthma and allergies
- individuals taking certain medications that suppress the immune system

The same amount of mold may cause health effects in one person, but not in another. Mold exposure can cause allergic symptoms, such as watery eyes, a runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, itching, coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing, and headaches.

When airborne mold spores are present, they can cause allergic reactions, asthma symptoms, infections, and other respiratory problems. See the Illinois Department of Public Health's (IDPH) fact sheet, "Mold and Your Health," for more information about health effects.

CAN MY HOME BE TESTED FOR MOLD?

If you can see or smell mold, testing is usually not necessary. You likely have a moisture problem that needs to be fixed.

Testing for mold can be very expensive, and interpreting results can be difficult or subjective. Homeowners must hire a contractor to test their homes. Testing cannot determine whether health effects will occur. Mold is usually found outdoors, and levels fluctuate from day to day depending on the season. Due to these uncertainties, IDPH does not recommend testing in most cases.

WHAT SHOULD I CLEAN AND WHAT SHOULD I GET RID OF?

If the home has been flooded, remove all drywall that is soft to the touch. Clean and disinfect it like other hard surfaces if it is still hard. Harder, non-porous materials, such as glass, plastic, or metal, can be kept after cleaning. Carpets and rugs that cannot be thoroughly dried and cleaned should be discarded and replaced. If the damaged area is small, you may be able to save the carpet by cleaning the area with a mild detergent. There are also professional home cleaning services that may be able to clean your carpets.

If flood water or sewer overflows cause the moisture problem, infectious organisms may also be a hazard. For information, visit "[After the Flood Comes the Clean Up.](#)"

HOW CAN I CLEAN MOLDY SURFACES?

It is essential to make sure that the source of moisture is fixed and the mold is cleaned up. If the source of moisture is not fixed, the mold will grow again. How you clean up areas contaminated with mold depends on the surface where the mold is growing. A professional should be consulted if large areas (more than 10 square feet) are contaminated with mold. If the surface is non-porous (glass, plastic, varnished wood, tile, etc.), you can take the following steps:

The surfaces first need to be cleaned:

- Use soap or detergent in warm water and scrub the entire area affected by the mold. Use a stiff brush or cleaning pad on block walls or uneven surfaces.
- Rinse with water.
- Dry completely.

The next step, if desired, is to disinfect the surfaces to help kill any mold missed by the initial cleaning.

- Ventilate the area before using a disinfectant.
- Disinfect the area with a household disinfectant. Be sure to follow label directions.
- Let disinfecting areas air dry completely.

HOW CAN I REDUCE MY EXPOSURE TO THE MOLD WHILE CLEANING IT UP?

During mold clean up, many spores may be released into the air. There are several ways you can protect yourself while cleaning up the mold to prevent health effects.

- Wear rubber gloves and clothing that can be easily cleaned or discarded.
- To prevent eye irritation, wear goggles that do not have ventilation holes.
- Wear an N95 mask to reduce the mold spores you breathe in.
- Tightly cover the air return vent if one is in the affected area.
- Turn on an exhaust fan or place a fan in a window to blow air out of the affected room to the outside (make sure the air is blowing outside the home, not into another room).
- Open windows in your house during and after the cleanup.
- Work over short time spans and take breaks in a fresh air location.
- Double-bag materials before you remove them from the contaminated area.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Illinois Department of Public Health
Division of Environmental Health
525 W. Jefferson St.
Springfield, IL 62761

217-782-5830

TTY (hearing impaired use only) 800-547-0466

DPH.Tox@illinois.gov

<http://www.dph.illinois.gov/>



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/mold-health/about/>

American Industrial Hygiene Association

<https://www.aiha.org/public-resources/healthierworkplaces/healthier-community-resources/disaster-response-resource-center/mold-resource-center>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

<https://www.epa.gov/mold>