



Household Mold

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What is mold and what conditions favor its growth?

Mold is an everyday term for a broad group of fungi that are present in the environment—both indoors and outdoors. Molds spread through microscopic spores that are commonly found in homes. These spores can grow on nearly every type of indoor material or surface that is wet, so the key to preventing mold growth is to prevent moisture problems.

How do molds affect people?

Exposure to mold may cause a variety of health problems, particularly in persons with mold allergies. The health effects vary greatly, depending on the person, the amount and duration of mold exposure, and other variables. Molds can irritate the eyes, skin, nose, throat, and lungs. Persons who are allergic to mold may experience coughing, wheezing, runny nose, red eyes, and/or skin rashes. More severe reactions like fever, shortness of breath, and asthma attacks may occur in people with more serious mold allergies. People with a greatly weakened immune system are at risk of developing serious respiratory infections.

Persons who are concerned that they might be experiencing symptoms due to mold exposure should consult their health care provider.

How much mold in the home is too much?

Any indoor mold growth is a problem because it can damage building materials. It is safest to treat any indoor mold growth as a "potential health hazard" that needs to be corrected, because there are no health standards for mold and the health effects of mold are not well understood. Any amount or type of mold should be removed and the moisture problem fixed.

Is it important to find out what type of mold is present in my home before cleaning it up?

No. All molds should be treated the same with respect to potential health risks and removal. It is usually a better use of resources to clean up the existing mold, and to identify and fix the moisture problem that is causing the mold growth. Standards for determining what constitutes an unhealthy amount of mold have not been established.

What is "toxic mold"?

Many molds can produce potentially harmful substances, including allergens, mycotoxins, or other compounds. The term "toxic mold" is inaccurate, and indoor molds are unlikely to be life-threatening. Much concern has been raised about a certain type of mold, *Stachybotrys chartarum*, which the media labeled as a "killer" mold because it was found in homes

of infants who died of an unusual “bleeding lung disease;” however, no connection between the mold and the illness was identified.

Does any federal, state, or local agency inspect or test homes for mold in Alaska?

No. There is no state or local agency that inspects or tests homes for mold, or interprets household mold test results.

What can I do to fix a mold problem in my home?

Mold cannot form or grow without a constant source of water. The source can be steam from the shower, condensation on windows, a leaky roof or pipe, improper weather sealing of the building, or flooding.

To control mold growth in the home:

- Keep humidity levels as low as possible, ideally no higher than 50%.
- Promptly fix leaky roofs, windows, and pipes.
- Ventilate shower, laundry, and cooking areas.
- Thoroughly and quickly clean up and dry out after a flood (ideally within 24–48 hours).

To clean up and remove indoor mold growth, follow steps 1–6 below:

1. Identify and fix the moisture problem.
2. Dry all wet materials as soon as possible; use fans and dehumidifiers, if needed.
3. Remove and dispose of mold-contaminated materials.
 - Items that have absorbed moisture (porous materials) and have mold growing on them, such as drywall, insulation, plaster, carpet, ceiling tiles, paper, and non-solid wood products should be bagged and thrown away.
 - Contaminated upholstery and fabrics, such as carpeting, floor padding, drapes, and furniture should be thrown away if they cannot be thoroughly cleaned.
4. Clean surfaces. Mold growing on non-porous or semi-porous materials, such as hard plastic, concrete, glass, metal, and solid wood can usually be cleaned.
 - Scrub all contaminated surfaces with either soap and water, a commercial mold cleaning product, or a bleach solution of no more than one cup of bleach in one gallon of water.
 - Bleach can irritate the eyes, nose, throat, and skin, so provide fresh air (ventilate) and protect the skin and eyes (see below).
 - Bleach can also corrode and damage materials, so test the bleach solution on a small area before using.
 - *Never mix bleach with ammonia or another household cleaner*, as this can cause the formation of toxic chlorine gas.
 - Collect excess cleaning liquid with a wet/dry vacuum, mop, or sponge.
 - Rinse the area with clean water and collect excess rinse water.
 - If the contaminated area is less than 10 square feet (i.e., a 3 ft. by 3 ft. patch), consult the EPA guidelines on mold remediation in schools and commercial buildings (see the resources section below).
5. Disinfect surfaces (optional). After cleaning has removed all visible mold, disinfecting may kill any remaining mold.
 - Mix ¼ to ½ cup bleach in one gallon of water and apply to cleaned surfaces with a sponge or other method that does not leave excess water.
 - Collect any run-off with a clean wet/dry vacuum, sponge, or mop.
 - Do not rinse or wipe the treated area. Allow surface to dry.
6. Remain on “mold alert.” Continue to look for signs of a moisture problem or return of mold growth. If mold returns, repeat steps 1–6. Re-growth may be a signal that the material should be removed or that the moisture problem is not fixed.

To protect yourself and others while cleaning up mold:

- Wear rubber gloves, rubber boots, eye goggles, and an N95 or N100 type disposable mask (readily available for purchase at hardware stores). If you are sensitive to mold, a more protective mask may be needed. Wear outer clothing that can be easily removed in the work area and washed or tossed out.
- Plan and perform all work to minimize the amount of mold disturbed or dust generated. See the resources section below (Mold in Homes) for more information on this topic.

What can I do about mold in my rented home or apartment?

If you see or smell mold in your rented home/apartment, it should be cleaned up and the moisture problem should be fixed. Inform your landlord verbally and in writing of the problem as soon as possible. Generally, the landlord is responsible for repairing moisture problems and cleaning up mold, unless it is an issue related to the tenant's behavior (e.g., using humidifiers or not using the bathroom or kitchen fans).

There are no state or federal laws that deal specifically with mold in rental units. The rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords with respect to mold can vary depending on the terms of the lease contract, the cause of the mold growth, and local (e.g., municipal) codes. For example, local property maintenance codes require that rental units be habitable and in good repair. If a rental unit becomes uninhabitable (not livable), this might constitute a breach of the lease. Refer to the publication, *The Alaska Landlord & Tenant Act: What it Means to You*, in the resources section below for more information.

If you live in federal or state financed housing or are a low-income tenant, you may be able to get help from the Alaska Housing and Urban Development Office (for federal housing projects) or the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (for state housing programs), depending on your situation. Low-income tenants may call Alaska Legal Services for help (see resources section below).

Resources

- A Brief Guide to Mold in the Workplace (U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration, OSHA): <http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib101003.html>
- A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home (EPA): <http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html>
- About Mold and Moisture (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, HUD): http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/healthy_homes/healthyhomes/mold
- Alaska Dept. of Health and Social Services, Section of Epidemiology, 907-269-8000
- Alaska Dept. of Law, Consumer Protection Unit, Landlord and Tenant Information: <http://www.law.state.ak.us/departments/civil/consumer/landlord-tenant.html>, 907-269-5200, 888-576-2529 to request a copy
- Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC), Division of Public Housing: 907-330-8428, 800-478-2432
- Alaska HUD, Anchorage Field Office: 907-677-9800, 877-302-9800
- Alaska Legal Services (free civil legal assistance for low-income Alaskans): <http://www.alsc-law.org/>, 800-478-2230
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/mold/>, 800-232-4636
- HUD Multifamily Housing Complaint Line: 800-685-8470
- Mold in Homes (MN Dept. of Health): <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/mold/index.html>
- Municipality of Anchorage, Dept. of Health and Human Services, Air Quality: <http://www.muni.org/departments/health/admin/environment/airq/Pages/default.aspx>, 907-343-4200
- Municipality of Anchorage, Code Violation Hotline: 907-343-4141

- Municipality of Anchorage, Dept. of Community Development, Building Safety Program: <http://www.muni.org/departments/ocpd/development/bsd/pages/default.aspx>, 907-343-8301
- Testing for Mold, and Guidelines for Selecting an Indoor Air Quality Consultant (MN Dept. of Health):
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/mold/moldtest.html>
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/selectingiaq.html>
- U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): <http://www.epa.gov/mold/>