

Mold in Rentals



The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Bureau of Community and Environmental Health has developed this fact sheet to help people better understand the possible hazards associated with indoor mold growth and options available to renters.

Mold and its Causes

Mold is a simple, common type of fungi that can be found virtually everywhere. Mold can grow on nearly every material and surface, even on the dust in the air we breathe. Any material that remains wet or moist for 24 to 48 hours can be a home for mold. Mold gives off tiny, lightweight particles, called spores, which can travel through the air and settle where the air is calm.

Examples of moisture sources for mold growth include flooding; bathing; cooking; laundry; fish tanks; backed-up sewers; leaky roofs, doors, and windows; humidifiers; damp basements; continuous plumbing leaks; plants; groundwater; sprinklers; and non-vented burning appliances (clothes dryers, ovens, stoves, water heaters, ranges).

Possible Health Effects of Mold

Some people are more susceptible to mold such as those with asthma and allergies, the elderly, pregnant women, and the immune compromised (those with diabetes, HIV infection, liver disease, or those undergoing chemotherapy). Mold-related health problems also depend on the amount of exposure, length of exposure, and susceptibility of the individual exposed.

Molds can cause allergic reactions similar to those caused by plant pollen (nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, sore throat, coughing, tightness in the chest, or wheezing among sensitive people). Symptoms usually disappear soon after the exposure ends without causing long-term effects.

Reduce Exposure and Prevent Mold

Here are some helpful tips for renters:

- ✧ Notify your landlord immediately if you notice plumbing leaks, excess moisture, mold growth that reappears despite regular cleaning.
- ✧ Use exhaust fans regularly in the kitchen, bathroom, and laundry room. Allow the fan to run until all excess moisture has been vented. If there are no fans, open windows and doors.
- ✧ Clean and dust your apartment on a regular basis.
- ✧ Periodically clean and dry the walls and floors around the sink, bathtub, shower, toilets, windows, and patio doors using a common household disinfecting cleaner.
- ✧ Ensure the clothes dryer is vented to the outside and clean the lint screen after every use.
- ✧ Do not overfill closets or storage areas.
- ✧ Keep your bed, dresser, and other objects pulled a few inches away from walls to allow moisture to escape.
- ✧ Do not block or close off heating and ventilation ducts in unused areas. Mold will attach to cold surfaces.
- ✧ Thoroughly dry any spills or pet urine on carpeting. You have 24-48 hours to dry something before mold will start growing.
- ✧ Immediately report any malfunction with your heating, ventilation, air conditioning system, or laundry system as well as any inoperable windows or doors.
- ✧ Keep doors and windows closed during rainy weather.

Cleaning and Removing Mold

Occupants can be exposed to high levels of mold particles during the cleaning process. Cleaning stirs the air causing mold spores to become airborne. When cleaning, you should wear eye protection, a respirator or mask, rubber gloves, and clothing that can be laundered or discarded after use. Be sure the area is well ventilated when using cleaning solutions.

After the moisture source has been identified and corrected, you must clean and dry the area **within 24 to 48 hours**. For surfaces such as cement floors, windows, and counter tops, use a non-ammonia soap/detergent and hot water or a commercial cleaner. Scrub all contaminated surfaces. Rinse clean with water. After cleaning, you can apply a disinfectant solution such as household bleach (1/4 cup bleach per gallon of water) to the surface. Allow the bleach solution to dry naturally for 6 to 8 hours. If you have a persistent mold problem, cleaning and disinfecting may have to be repeated using a stronger solution.

Testing for Mold

Knowing the type of mold does not change the way you respond. It should be cleaned and the moisture source identified and fixed. Mold testing is expensive and money spent on testing will not be available for cleaning up the mold and fixing the moisture problem.

Remember, mold has to have water to thrive. No water, no mold. Find the water problem and you will find the mold.

Testing your home for mold is usually not recommended or necessary and may even cause more questions than answers. If you see and smell mold, you have mold.

Persistent Mold Problem

Idaho State law dictates that the tenant is responsible for preventing damages (other than normal wear and tear) on the rental property and may be required to compensate the landlord for damages that occur due to his or her own negligence. If a major water incursion is found or the seriousness of the problem is unknown, promptly notify your property manager and landlord. Follow verbal communication with a written letter to avoid misunderstandings and document the event for possible future legal proceedings.

If a landlord fails or refuses to make necessary repairs, the tenant can take steps to ensure the mold problem is resolved. First, check your lease agreement for terms regarding maintenance. Mold problems may not be mentioned specifically, but other agreements about repairs may apply. Review the Idaho ¹*Landlord and Tenant Guidelines* packet to find out about landlord-tenant laws. Seeking this information and presenting it to the landlord often convinces a landlord to make repairs. If the problem is still not resolved, the tenant can take legal action. For this, remember to document mold infestations with photographs and written descriptions, and follow the steps listed in the Idaho *Landlord and Tenant Guidelines* packet.

¹These laws can be found in the Idaho Landlord and Tenant Guidelines packet and viewed at: <http://www2.state.id.us/ag/consumer/tips/landlordtenant.pdf> or you can request a hard copy by writing to: Attorney General Statehouse, Boise, ID 83720-0010 or by calling the Indoor Environment Program at 1-800-445-8647.

For more information on mold and other indoor air pollutants, please contact the Idaho Indoor Environment Program at 1-800-445-8647 or email us at bceh@dhw.idaho.gov or contact the IAQ Information Clearinghouse at 1-800-438-4318. Please note that the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare does not provide direct services, such as inspections or testing for mold problems.