

Mold in Our Homes

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
Division of Health
Bureau of Community and Environmental Health
Indoor Environment Program

Molds are simple microscopic fungi that can be found everywhere. Molds need a moist environment to live. Outdoors, molds can be found in shady, damp areas or where leaves or other plants are rotting. Indoors, they can be found in areas where humidity is higher, such as basements, closets, windows, or showers.

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



Molds give off tiny particles called spores, which can travel through the air and settle where the air is calm. Molds come in different shapes and sizes and range in color from white, orange, green, brown, and black.

Mold in Your Home

If you can see mold or smell an earthy or musty odor, you probably have moisture and mold problems. Look for water damage on materials such as ceiling tiles, sheetrock, plaster, wood products, or carpet/carpet pad. Visible mold growth is often found underneath materials where water has damaged surfaces or behind walls. Look for discoloration and leaching from plaster.

Note: New homes are not immune to mold problems, nor are regions of the country considered to have dry climates.

Testing your home for mold can be very expensive. However, if you decide you would like to have your home tested, it is recommended you hire a trained and experienced environmental consultant. Check references and ask how results of the test will benefit you. If you already know you have mold, spend the time and money on cleanup rather than testing.



Health Effects from Mold Problems

Mold in your home could be causing more problems than just an unpleasant odor. Molds produce allergens, irritants, and in some cases, potentially toxic substances (mycotoxins). Breathing or touching mold or mold spores can cause allergic reactions in sensitive people. Allergic responses include hay fever-type symptoms such as sneezing, running nose, red eyes, and skin rash. Allergic reactions to mold are common. Molds are also a common asthma trigger for asthmatics. Symptoms will usually disappear soon after the exposure ends without causing long-term effects. Individuals most affected by mold include infants, elderly, those with compromised immune systems (diabetics, those with HIV infection, liver disease, or undergoing chemotherapy), pregnant women, and people with respiratory problems such as asthma and allergies.

Preventing Mold Problems

Specific Recommendations:

- * Keep the house dry, especially in damp areas like the bathroom or the basement. Use exhaust fans when showering or bathing.
- * Look for leaky pipes, clogged drains, or bad water drainage systems beneath the ground surrounding your home.
- * Be sure your home has adequate ventilation, including exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathrooms.
- * Vent your clothes dryer to the outside.
- * Avoid carpeting bathrooms and basements; use area rugs instead.
- * Remove or replace previously soaked carpets and upholstery that have not dried out within 48 hours.
- * Paint walls with a brand that contains a fungicide. Ventilate well when using these paints.
- * Use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier during humid months. Ensure that they are drained properly and maintained according to manufacturers' recommendations.
- * Place a plastic cover over dirt in crawlspaces to prevent moisture from coming in from the ground. Be sure crawlspaces are well ventilated.

Remember: mold needs moisture to grow. Control the moisture and you will control the mold.

Removing Mold from Your Home

Occupants can be exposed to high levels of mold particles during the cleaning process. Cleaning stirs the air, causing molds to become airborne. When cleaning, you should wear eye protection, a respirator or mask, rubber gloves, and clothing that can be laundered. 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. Remove and throw out porous materials. For non-porous surfaces such as cement floors, windows, and counter tops, scrub with detergent and warm water, and dry completely. If you have a persistent mold problem, cleaning may have to be repeated. For more information on mold and other indoor air pollutants, contact the Idaho Indoor Environment Program toll-free at 1-800-445-8647, or the IAQ Information Clearinghouse at 1-800-438-4318. *Note: Disturbing molds during the clean-up process can spread mold spores throughout the home. Thoroughly wet all areas of suspected contamination to reduce the spreading.*

For More Information

Toll-Free: 1-800-445-8647

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