

Why all the fuss about mold?

Mold has always been a natural part of our environment. It plays a key role in breaking down organic matter into a reusable form.

Problems occur when mold begins to grow on the materials that make up our homes and workplaces. This brings people in closer contact to mold growth where spores, cells, and other products of the mold can affect human health. Widespread mold could also eventually weaken the structural integrity of the building.

How mold can effect health?

The potential for health effects from exposure to mold depends on many factors including the:

- ✓ exposed person's immune system,
- ✓ type of mold, and
- ✓ conditions of mold growth.

While people do not always become sick when mold is present, excessive mold growth does increase the potential health risks due to exposure.

The most common health effects linked to high levels of mold growth are:

- ✓ headache,
- ✓ breathing difficulties,
- ✓ skin irritation,
- ✓ allergic reactions, and
- ✓ aggravation of asthma.

Usually, these effects only last a short time after mold exposure has stopped.

How do you deal with mold problems?

Once mold has become established, it can be more difficult to eliminate. But basic mold prevention steps can still help.

To eliminate a current mold problem:

- ✓ fix problem(s) causing excess moisture in the impacted area,
- ✓ remove the mold by cleaning or disposing of moldy materials,
- ✓ dry the area thoroughly, and
- ✓ prevent further mold growth by keeping the area dry and maintaining proper humidity.

When is removal of building materials necessary?

Mold growing on the surface of porous materials will also grow deeper into the surface.

- ✓ Examples: Dry wall, plaster, and manufactured wood products.
- ✓ Cleaning and disinfecting porous materials will only remove surface mold growth.
- ✓ Remaining mold within porous materials will re-appear on the surface quickly.
- ✓ Re-growth of existing mold requires less moisture than new mold growth.

Remove porous materials supporting mold growth unless:

- ✓ the material and the cavity behind it is dried thoroughly and kept dry, and
- ✓ mold growth is cleaned off before it can penetrate the surface.

Hard surfaced material (metal, plastic, and glass) can be cleaned effectively.

Cleaning Up Mold

Cleaning moldy surfaces will likely increase your exposure to mold.

- ✓ Wear rubber gloves, mask, and eye protection to decrease exposure.
- ✓ Cleaning larger areas (≥ 10 square feet) should be left to an experienced person or professional.
- ✓ Sensitive individuals should avoid exposure to mold during cleaning.

Clean moldy surfaces with a bathroom cleaner or another detergent. The area can be disinfected with a dilute bleach solution (1 unit bleach, 9 units water) if desired.

Rinse surface as needed and dry thoroughly. A dehumidifier and/or fans may be needed to dry the surface or area completely.

Bleach solution will kill most molds but the dead mold can still be an allergen or irritant to susceptible people. Therefore, thorough cleaning to remove visible mold is important prior to disinfection. HEPA-vacuums are useful for removing mold spores produced by excessive mold growth.

Resources

Public Health Madison & Dane County,
(608) 266-4821,
www.publichealthmdc.com

WI Department of Health Services,
(608) 266-1120,
www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/mold/index.htm

US Environmental Protection Agency,
www2.epa.gov/mold/brief-guide-mold-moisture-and-your-home

What about the toxic effects?

In addition to the more common allergenic and irritant effects, some molds may produce toxins that are harmful to human health. However, these molds often require specific conditions in order to release toxins. The presence of mold does not guarantee that toxins are present.

How do you PREVENT mold problems?

Mold requires spores, oxygen, organic material, and water to grow. **Removing excess water is the best way to prevent mold.** The following are some general guidelines for preventing mold problems.

To prevent mold problems:

- ✓ fix problem(s) causing excess water,
- ✓ dry materials that are damp or wet in 48 hrs,
- ✓ use a dehumidifier to maintain humidity between 30-60%,
- ✓ ensure adequate ventilation,
- ✓ prevent condensation by increasing insulation or air circulation,
- ✓ keep heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) drip pans clean and flowing properly,
- ✓ vent clothes dryers to the outside,
- ✓ improve drainage around the building foundation,
- ✓ clean visible mold growth before it gets out of hand, and
- ✓ use humidifiers only if you know humidity levels are less than 30%.

Mastering Mold

in your Home or Workplace

