

## Mold and Health Concerns

Mold growth is a common occurrence in flood-damaged homes and damp environments. Mold could become a problem in your home if there is enough moisture for mold to thrive and multiply. Dampness in basements, walls, carpets and wood provides an environment for mold to flourish.

Mold is made up of simple microscopic organisms found almost everywhere. It often can be seen as discoloration, ranging from white to orange and from green to brown and black, and gives off a musty or earthy smell.

Exposure to mold can cause health problems. Infants, children, immune-compromised patients, pregnant women, individuals with existing respiratory conditions, (allergies, multiple chemical sensitivity, and asthma) and the elderly appear to be at higher risks for adverse health effects from mold.

Health symptoms associated with exposure to mold include nose and throat irritation, wheezing, coughing, asthma attacks and lower-respiratory-tract infections (in children). People with pre-existing respiratory conditions also may be susceptible to more serious lung infections.

### **Mold Prevention Tips**

There is no practical way to eliminate all the indoor molds and mold spores, but there are many ways to help control moisture and mold growth in the home. The basic rule is, if you can see or smell mold, then take steps to eliminate the excess moisture, and clean up and remove the mold. It is important to act quickly, before health problems develop.

#### **Stop the Water**

- Fix leaks in pipes, and dry any damp area around tubs and sinks.
- Rebuild or retrofit with water-resistant building materials such as tile, stone, deep-sealed concrete, galvanized or stainless steel hardware, indoor/outdoor carpeting, waterproof wallboard, and water-resistant glues.
- Prevent seepage of water from outdoors into your house. It's important to have rainwater from gutters or the roof drain away from the house. Ground around the house needs to slope away to keep basement and crawl space dry.
- Cover dirt in crawl spaces with plastic to prevent moisture rising from the ground. Ventilate the area as much as possible.

#### **Keep It Clean**

- Clean fabrics (such as curtains and upholstery) often and keep them dry.
- Store clean fabric items in well-ventilated areas.
- Consider having air ducts cleaned professionally if you suspect mold exists on the inside surface of the duct or if duct insulation has been wet.

#### **Keep It Dry**

- Reduce the moisture in the air with dehumidifiers, fans and open windows or air conditioners, especially in hot weather. Do NOT use fans if mold may already exist; a fan will spread the mold spores.
- Try to keep the humidity in your home below 40 percent.
- In moisture-prone areas, eliminate carpets or choose carpets of man-made fibers.
- Insulate to reduce potential for condensation on cold surfaces.

#### **Disinfect It**

- Routinely check potential problem spots such as the basement, bathroom and laundry for moldy odors.
- Disinfect often with a 10-percent solution of bleach – approximately one cup of bleach to a gallon of water.

**Additional information on mold and mold cleanup can be found on these Web sites:**

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – [www.epa.gov/moldguide.htm](http://www.epa.gov/moldguide.htm)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protet.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protet.asp)



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