



NEWS RELEASE

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Proper Cleanup After a Flood Can Prevent Illnesses Caused by Mold

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health is encouraging residents who have experienced flooding in their homes to take steps to prevent the growth of mold, according to Terry O'Clair, director of the Division of Air Quality for the Department of Health.

Mold can grow quickly in homes and other buildings following a flood. When airborne mold spores are present in large numbers, they can trigger allergic reactions, asthma episodes, infections and other respiratory problems. In addition, exposure can cause development of an allergy to mold, resulting in long-term health problems.

“People who have asthma or lung problems and those who are allergic to mold are especially vulnerable to mold-related illness,” O'Clair said. “It is important to clean, disinfect and thoroughly dry areas that were flooded and remove the source of moisture, or mold will grow. If you already have mold, make sure to clean it up thoroughly so that it doesn't continue to grow.”

If you can see or smell mold, a mold problem likely exists. (Mold has a musty or earthy odor.) The first step in the clean-up process is to identify the source of moisture and correct it. Then clean, disinfect and dry the moldy area.

- Use a non-ammonia soap or detergent and hot water or a commercial cleaner.
- Thoroughly scrub all contaminated surfaces with the soap or detergent. (Use a stiff brush to clean masonry walls.)
- Rinse all surfaces with clean water.

Moist, fibrous materials and stagnant water provide the ideal climate for mold growth. Since molds can infiltrate sheet rock, carpeting and insulation, these materials generally should be discarded if they become saturated.

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After cleaning, apply a disinfectant solution of household bleach to the surface (one to two cups bleach per gallon of water). The bleach solution can be applied with a garden sprayer or wiped on with a sponge or rag. Be sure to wet the studs, wall cavities and floors thoroughly. Use a wet-dry vacuum to collect extra bleach solution. Allow the bleach solution to dry naturally for a six- to eight-hour time period. The bleach solution should not be removed or dried quickly because extended contact time is important.

- Never mix bleach with ammonia because the fumes are toxic.
- Wear eye protection and rubber gloves when working with bleach.
- Ventilate the area well by opening doors and windows.

When working around mold, use respiratory protection. People vary in their susceptibility, but almost anyone who breathes enough mold spores will have an adverse reaction. Such reactions may include wheezing and difficulty breathing, aches and pains, fever or even more severe reactions.

People who have questions about the cleanup of a flood-damaged home can call the North Dakota Department of Health at 701.328.5188 or their local public health unit. Fact sheets with flood-related information can be found on the department's website at www.ndhealth.gov/flood.

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