



mold control: tips for identifying and eliminating household mold and moisture problems

Molds can be found in a variety of locations within your home, from the surface of foods to indoor plants and household materials like plywood, drywall or fabric. Molds are simple, microscopic organisms that need the right temperatures, nutrients and moisture to grow. Controlling moisture is key to preventing mold growth.

When present in large quantities, mold can cause health problems, including allergic reactions, asthma episodes and respiratory problems. In addition, homeowners can incur large bills for structural damage caused by water or water vapor trapped behind the walls. This is a prime location for mold to grow. That is why it is important to identify potential situations where mold can grow.

When damage has occurred, take steps to clean and thoroughly dry the area. Remedying the source of the moisture problem is a vital step or, most likely, the mold will grow back.

Preventing mold growth

- Clean, disinfect, and dry surfaces.
- Check for leaks; if found, repair and clean any moisture damage caused by the leak.
- Reduce moisture in the home by using ventilation at the source of any moisture. When showering or washing dishes use an exhaust fan or open a window.
- For good overall moisture control throughout the home, use low speed continuous ventilation, such as a centrally run mechanical ventilation system installed by a qualified contractor.
- Keep relative humidity in homes to between 40-50% year round. This may require a dehumidifier during air conditioning seasons.
- Vent clothes dryers, stoves and other appliances that produce moisture to the outside.

- Fix all leaks, increase air movement and ventilation, and keep appliance drip pans clean.

It is a good precaution to always wear gloves, goggles and high quality respiratory protection when cleaning areas affected by mold growth and when removing damaged materials.

Identifying mold

Detecting mold growth is fairly easy. Look for the following:

- Visible mold growth (*discoloration ranging from white to orange and from green to brown or black*)
- Musty odor
- Discoloration of building materials in areas where previous water damage occurred, such as drywall and plaster or plywood

To test or not to test

Testing for mold is not necessary if you see mold or smell a musty odor. Fixing the moisture problem and following these next steps to remedy the situation is usually the best practice.

The remedy

Once you have identified mold growth in your home, follow these steps to remedy the situation:

- Identify and correct the moisture source (*e.g., leaky roof or window*).
- Clean and dry the wet area. (*Should be cleaned quickly; mold will grow within 24 to 48 hours.*)
- Scrub off the mold with detergent and water.
- Let cleaned areas dry thoroughly overnight.
- Remove or clean any materials affected by the mold.

- Porous materials that have been damaged by mold, such as sheetrock, carpeting and plywood, need to be removed.
- Bag and discard the materials at the work area rather than possibly spreading contaminants throughout the home.
- Provide continuous and controlled ventilation in work area, with the area of contamination kept at a negative pressure in relationship to the rest of the home. (*In other words, air should flow from clean to dirty areas.*)

Avoid future problems

Once you have removed the mold growth and fixed the source of the problem, make sure you and your home do not sustain further damage by checking for the following symptoms regularly:

- Condensation on windows
- Cracking or staining of plasterboard
- Drywall tape loosening
- Warping wood
- Musty odor

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For further information:

- American Lung Association® Health House®: <http://www.HealthHouse.org>
- American Lung Association: <http://www.LungUSA.org>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: http://www.CDC.gov/nceh/airpollution/mold/strats_fungal_growth.htm
- Environmental Protection Agency: <http://www.EPA.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html>
- Local Department of Health

These tips are brought to you by the American Lung Association® Health House® program.

For more information on creating a healthier home environment, visit our Web site at HealthHouse.org.