

Mold: How it affects our home and our health



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What is mold and where can I find it?

Mold is a type of fungal growth made up of tiny organisms that can be found on various kinds of decaying matter that contain moisture. Different species of mold can be found in both outdoor and indoor environments. Molds such as mushrooms and other fungi typically found outdoors are important because they help break down decomposed plants and recycle the nutrients into the environment. Mold found indoors, however, often look like a stain that can be seen in a variety of colors, such as green, gray, white, brown, black, or red.

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How are mold and moisture related?

By fixing moisture problems, you can keep mold from growing in your home. To grow and reproduce, mold only needs food—any organic matter, such as leaves, wood, paper, or even dust, and moisture. Organic matter is almost always around, so whether mold grows depends on whether there is moisture present.

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How might I be exposed to mold?

Mold grows and reproduces by feeding off the combination of moisture and organic matter, such as wood, paper, cotton, dust, etc. If moisture is present, mold can grow – even in your home. For example, bathrooms in homes typically have windows to allow any steam build up from showers or sinks to escape. If the bathroom does not have a window, then there's usually ventilation to help reduce the moisture in the air. Having enough air flow in your home by opening windows or using ventilation is crucial because it helps reduce moisture in areas of your home that typically contain moisture, such as the kitchen and bathroom, which reduces the chance of mold from growing. As mold grows, they release tiny spores that travel through the air. When people breathe in these mold spores, they are now exposed to mold. Everyone is exposed to some amount of mold every day but being exposed to large amounts of mold or small amounts over an extensive period can lead to health risks.

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How can mold affect my health?

Exposure to mold spores can cause allergic reactions, referred to as hay fever, for those who are prone to allergies. Mold can also trigger asthma attacks if the person is asthmatic. Overexposure to mold in the home makes people more susceptible to respiratory infections and in extreme cases, weaken the immune system. Infants, young children, elders, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to develop severe symptoms from exposure to mold.



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How can I prevent mold?

Regularly inspect your surroundings and look for signs of excessive moisture or water damage to eliminate any problems as quickly as possible. Make sure you repair any leaks and check to see if your home is adequately ventilated. Thoroughly clean and dry areas in your home if you experience any flooding. If you can see mold, clean it up. If you can smell a musty odor, throw out any objects that contain this odor as it may be a health risk. Remember, you do not need to know what type of mold is growing in your home as these tests may be expensive and unnecessary.

Ways you can detect mold:

- Feel for soft spots on surfaces. Does the ceiling sag in any of the rooms in your home?
- Warped or cracked flooring. Do you feel gradual rises underneath the carpet? Are there any gaps between the floorboards?

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I think my home contains mold, now what?

1. If you are not the owner of your home, notify the property owner or manager of any water leaks (roofing or plumbing) or any spot in your home that contains excessive moisture.
2. Open windows or use ventilation fans to prevent moisture from building up in bathrooms, kitchens, or any other area of your home where moisture is present.
3. Clean up any surface that contains moisture or mildew as soon as possible using proper safety gear.



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What can be kept and what should be disposed?

It is important to eliminate the source of the moisture and to clean up mold quickly and safely when materials have become saturated with moisture, otherwise, the mold will return. If moisture has saturated the material, such as a drywall or porous material like carpet and home furnishings, the items may need to be replaced or the mold will return quickly.

Deciding what to keep:

- Keep items and materials that do not absorb water (glass, plastic, metal, or ceramics) and can be cleaned of mold.
- Keep items that do not have mold on them and do not smell moldy.
- Some washable moldy items like clothing and bedding may be cleaned well enough to keep, so it may be worth trying.
- Keep throw rugs that have gotten wet only if they can be thoroughly washed and do not smell moldy once they dry.

Remove and throw out:

- Wet materials that absorb water and look or smell moldy, like drywall or gypsum board, ceiling tiles, drapes, upholstered furniture, and products made from particleboard.

- Materials that have dried but look or smell moldy.
 - Moldy wall-to-wall carpet can be hard to clean well. Throw out if the carpet, backing, or padding is moldy or has a moldy smell.
 - If there has been flooding, remove drywall/gypsum board to a level above the high-water mark. Look inside the wall space and throw out any material, like insulation, that is wet, moldy, or has a moldy smell.

If tightly bagged or enclosed, moldy items can be put in the household trash. Materials that have lead or asbestos in them must be taken to a household hazardous waste program. Some materials that might have lead or asbestos are:

- Ceiling tiles
- Vinyl floor tiles
- Painted wood, plaster, or drywall/gypsum board in homes built before 1978



How do I clean up mold?



Mold which appears as a result of everyday activities, such as showering, is the responsibility of the tenant to clean. Mold growth due to plumbing leaks, roof leaks, leaks from around windows, or sprinklers hitting the side of the house, are the responsibility of the landlord. When cleaning surfaces of mold growth, it is always important to avoid breathing in mold, and wear protective gear.

When cleaning mold, close off the work area to keep dust and spores from spreading to other areas:

- Close the door or use plastic sheets to separate the room.
- Set up a fan to pull the air out through a window or door to the outside.
- Scrub the entire moldy area with a non-ammonia soap or detergent, or a commercial cleaner, in hot water, using sponges or rags, until all mold is gone.
- Use a stiff brush or cleaning pad on cement-block walls and other uneven surfaces.
- Rinse cleaned items with water and dry thoroughly.

Avoid breathing in mold: Wear a N-95 respirator, available at many hardware stores, and make sure it fits tightly around the face. Work for short periods of time and take breaks where you can breathe fresh air.

Wear protective gear: Make sure you wear gloves and goggles. Avoid touching mold or moldy items with your bare hands; household rubber gloves may be used. Wear clothes that cover as much of your body as possible, this includes your hair and shoes.



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What should I look for when hiring a contractor to remove mold?

Make sure to hire a licensed contractor or other professional with experience and specific training in mold remediation or “mold abatement.” Although there is no license or certification by the State of California specifically for fixing moisture or mold problems, you can find professionals who are certified for mold abatement by national professional organizations and trade groups. When choosing a contractor, ask questions about their specific training and experience, if they have a license or certification for mold remediation, make sure they have insurance, and ask for references. Also, ask the contractor to explain the exact work they will do to solve your mold and moisture problem.



For detailed information on cleaning up mold, visit www.epa.gov/mold/mold-cleanup-your-home.



Note: If you have already notified the homeowner/ property manager and they do not make the necessary repairs to your unit, you may report problems to (888) 700-9995 between Monday – Friday from 8:00am to 5:00pm. You can also file a report online at www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/eh/ and select, “File a Complaint”, or by scanning the QR code.