

## How do I clean-up?

For any mold problem, the moisture source needs to be eliminated first. Air circulation and increased light may also reduce mold growth.

If the contaminated area is **approximately less than 2 square feet**:

- Wear personal protective gear such as gloves, and only individuals who are free from allergy, asthma, and immune disorders should clean the area.
- Contaminated porous materials should be placed in a sealed plastic bag before disposing outside the building to prevent further contamination.
- Wash all remaining non-absorbent surfaces and surrounding areas with 10% bleach solution (1.5 cups/1 gallon water) and let the area sit for 15 minutes. Rinse with water and allow thorough drying.

If an area of mold is **approximately between 2 and 30 square feet**:

- Using the same procedure as the 2 sq. ft. case, take the additional precaution of covering the contaminated material with plastic sheets and tape before removing or handling the material. Then seal the material in a plastic bag before carrying it through the rest of the building.

If the area of mold is **more than 30 square feet** or is **in an HVAC system**:

- Personnel experienced in mold clean-up and disinfection or in handling of hazardous materials (such as asbestos) are necessary.

**Porous materials such as wood, carpet, or fiberboard should be discarded if contaminated because they may harbor spores. Only nonporous materials such as glass, plastic, or metal can be kept after they are cleaned and disinfected.**

## Who do I contact for more information?

For questions regarding mold and indoor air quality, contact:

**Nebraska Health and Human Services System  
Indoor Air Quality Program  
P.O. Box 95007  
Lincoln, NE 68509  
(402) 471-0594**

**Cooperative Extension  
Room 205 Home Economics  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Lincoln, NE 68583-0804  
(402) 472-6319**

**Southeast District Health Department  
2511 Schneider Ave  
Auburn, NE 68305  
877-777-0424**



# Mold

## What Is It and How Do I Deal With It?

Southeast District Health  
Department  
2511 Schneider Ave.  
Auburn Ne 68305  
Toll Free: 877-777-0424

Many people consider mold an inconvenience in a wet basement or poorly ventilated bathroom. But molds can be much more than just an inconvenience—they can affect the health of you and your house. Here are some frequently asked questions and their answers.

### **What is mold?**

Molds are microscopic fungi, which are neither plants or animals. In nature, molds use enzymes to eat dead plants and animals. If there is a moist environment and other proper conditions, molds can attack materials in a house or building such as fiberboard, drywall, carpet backing, paper, dust, wood, or exposed soils in crawlspaces. Once established in a building, molds/fungi can spread, destroying structural wood components, and can be hard to get rid of.

### **Why is mold growing in my home?**

Molds are part of the natural environment. There are many types of mold but none of them will grow without water or moisture. Outdoors, molds play an important part in nature by breaking down dead organic matter such as fallen leaves and dead trees, but indoors, mold growth should be avoided. Molds reproduce by means of tiny spores that are invisible to the naked eye and float through outdoor and indoor air. Mold may begin growing indoors when mold spores land on surfaces that are wet.

### **Why is mold hazardous?**

Molds use tiny spores to reproduce. Spores that become airborne are hard to filter out and can stay suspended in the air for long periods of time. The spores can then be easily inhaled, causing the following symptoms:

- **headaches and/or fever**
- **coughing, wheezing**
- **runny nose/sinus problems**

- **skin rashes**
- **diarrhea**
- **hypersensitivity, pneumonitis, asthma, or other immune responses**

A few mold species are capable of producing toxins if a proper food source is available. People vary in their sensitivity to the concentration of spores in the air. The elderly, children, and people with compromised immune systems are most vulnerable to the effects of spores, but even healthy people may react to high concentrations.

### **How do I prevent mold?**

As part of routine maintenance, buildings should be checked for evidence of water damage and visible mold. Conditions that can cause mold (water leaks, flooding, high humidity, condensation) should be corrected.

### **Can mold cause health problems?**

Molds are usually not a problem indoors, unless mold spores land on a wet or damp spot and begin growing. Molds may cause health problems. Molds produce allergens (substances that can cause allergic reactions), irritants, and in some cases, potentially toxic substances (mycotoxins). Inhaling or touching mold or mold spores may cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals. Allergic responses include hay fever-type symptoms, such as sneezing, runny nose, red eyes, and skin rash (dermatitis). Allergic reactions to mold are common. They can be immediate or delayed. Molds can also cause asthma attacks in people with asthma who are allergic to mold. In addition, mold exposure can irritate the eyes, skin, nose, throat, and lungs of both mold-allergic and non-allergic people. Symptoms other than the allergic and irritant types are not commonly reported as a result of inhaling mold. Research on mold and health effects is ongoing. This brochure provides a brief overview; it does not describe all potential health effects related to mold exposure. For more detailed information consult a health professional.

You may also wish to consult your state or local health department.

### **Is there mold in my house?**

For mold to grow, it needs moisture and a food source. The following are conditions where indoor mold growth can occur:

- Flooding without proper cleanup
- Rainfall through leaky roofs
- Plumbing or waterline leaks
- Persistent elevated relative humidity above 60%

If you can see visible mold growth or smell musty odors, then you probably have mold growing in your home.

### **Should I test for mold?**

Testing is expensive and sometimes unreliable because molds are naturally present in the outdoor environment. If you can see it or smell it, you've probably got mold in your house. Unless it is for legal or insurance purposes, testing/sampling for mold isn't recommended.

### **How do I get rid of mold?**

Molds gradually destroy the things they grow on. You can prevent damage to your home and furnishings, save money, and avoid potential health problems by controlling moisture and eliminating mold growth

It is impossible to get rid of all mold and mold spores indoors; some mold spores will be found floating through the air and in house dust. The mold spores will not grow if moisture is not present. Indoor mold growth can and should be prevented or controlled by controlling moisture indoors. If there is mold growth in your home, you must clean up the mold and fix the water problem. If you clean up the mold, but don't fix the water problem, then, most likely, the mold problem will come back.