

WHAT ARE MOLDS?

Molds are simple, microscopic organisms that are found everywhere. They reproduce by forming spores, which are very small and lightweight, making it easy for them to travel through the air. Mold spores are almost always present in outdoor and indoor air. All mold needs to grow and produce spores is a food source (leaves, wood, paper, dirt), a surface to grow on, and moisture. Moisture is the most important, because without moisture, mold can't grow. You do not have to have standing water for mold to grow. The humidity in the air can provide enough moisture for molds to grow.

Mold is like a plant and like all plants, mold has roots. What we see on the surface of an object are the stalk and spores. The roots extend into the object and can't be seen. Unless the roots are killed, the mold will grow back. Spores are the "seeds" produced by the mold which become airborne and are moved by air currents throughout the home, starting new colonies of mold when they land on moist surfaces.

WHAT PROBLEMS DO MOLDS CAUSE?

When molds are present in a home, spores and pieces of the mold can cause allergic and sensitivity reactions. The most common symptoms are runny nose, eye and skin irritation, cough, congestion and trigger asthma.

Molds can cause structural damage to your home leading to costly repairs and could reduce the value.

If you can see mold or can smell an earthy or musty odor, you can safely assume you have a mold problem.

FINDING MOLD

Mold is commonly found in places where there is a lot of water or condensation, such as under a leaking sink, damp basements or the tracks of poorly insulated windows. Start your mold search by looking for places where there are or have been water leaks. Other not so obvious places to look for mold:

- Surfaces in a room where water condenses -- usually along the outside walls.
- Behind pieces of furniture that are in contact with outside walls.
- In closets where clothing and boxes are in contact with outside walls
- Sides of walls near the floor, behind the baseboards and under the carpeting.
- Where sprinklers may have been hitting the side of the house.
- On the back side of dry wall, wallpaper, or paneling.

Once the source of moisture is found, fix the leak and dry the area as quickly as possible.

CLEANING MOLD

When mold is found on something that easily absorbs water, such as ceiling tiles, mattresses, overstuffed furniture or carpeting, the item should be discarded. Unless the item has sentimental value, attempting to clean it to a safe level is not cost effective nor worth the time and effort. Moldy items should be discarded by placing them into a plastic bag and placing the bag in the trash.

When mold is found on a non-porous or semi-porous surface, it can usually be cleaned. Proper cleaning removes mold from the environment. It is healthier to remove the source of the mold than to kill the mold. Dead mold still causes health problems.

Guidelines on Cleaning Mold:

If the moldy area is less than 10 square feet (approximately 3 ft. by 3 ft.), you may be able to handle the job yourself, following the guidelines set out below:

- Use non-ammonia soap, detergent or a commercial cleaner in hot water.
- Thoroughly scrub all contaminated surfaces. Use a stiff brush to clean concrete blocks, wood, walls and other semi-porous surfaces with the soap/detergent to remove the mold at the surface.
- Rinse with clean water and remove the excess water.
- Dry thoroughly and quickly.

The EPA does not recommend using bleach as it is not registered as a fungicide. However, CDC does recommend bleach. You will need to thoroughly scrub the mold off the surface before applying any type of fungicide. If you choose to use bleach, follow these general instructions.

- Wet the scrubbed surface of the object with a solution of 1 cup of bleach per gallon of water. The surface should be wet, but without run off.
- Allow the bleach solution to dry naturally, extended contact time is important to kill the mold.

PROTECT YOURSELF

- **Avoid breathing in mold or mold spores.** In order to limit your exposure to airborne mold, you may want to wear an N-95 respirator, available at many hardware stores.
- Ventilate the working area well by opening doors and windows to the outside. Use fans that blow the air to the outside.

- Wear clothing that can be easily cleaned or discarded.
- Wear rubber gloves and eye protection.
- Seal off the room using painters tape and dropcloths over vents and around inside doors to keep mold particles from spreading to the rest of the house.

TIPS FOR KEEPING MOLD OUT OF YOUR HOME:

- Inspect your home, inside and out, for evidence of water damage and visible mold.
- Fix leaky plumbing and other sources of water.
- Use exhaust fans vented to the outside or open windows in kitchens and bathrooms when showering, cooking or using the dishwasher.
- Keep the relative humidity of your home at 50% or less. Increase the temperature to dry out the air and open the windows to provide ventilation whenever possible.
- Make sure the dryer is vented to the outside.
- Change heating and air conditioning filters often. Consider using pleated filters instead of spun glass filters.
- Leave lids open, especially on washing machines, insulated coolers, etc, when not in use.
- Thoroughly dry wet items as quickly as possible – within 24 to 48 hours.
- Do not place rubber backed mats or carpets on concrete floors, especially in basements.
- Do not carpet bathrooms or kitchens.
- Make sure that your lawn sprinklers are not spraying the sides of your home.
- Make sure your yard drains or slopes away from your home to avoid water collecting in the crawl spaces and around foundation

- Keep the rain gutters clear of debris, which could force the water to take a different route – down the walls of your home.
- Paints with mold inhibitors are available. Ask your paint supplier about this option.

“BLACK,” “TOXIC MOLD” AND TESTING

The terms “black mold” and “toxic mold” are media words usually referring to *Stachybotrys chartarum*, a mold thought to be associated with severe health problems. **All** molds have the ability to produce toxins, but they do not produce them all the time, if at all. Because all molds have the potential to cause health problems either because we have allergies to them or we are sensitive to the toxins they may be producing, the Benton-Franklin Health District considers all molds to be potentially harmful and **does not** recommend testing. Testing can be very expensive and there are no set standards for mold levels. You are much better off putting your money into cleaning, removing and repairing the damage caused by mold.

For more information or advice:

Benton-Franklin Health District
 Environmental Health Division
 7102 W. Okanogan Place
 Kennewick, WA 99336
 509.460.4205
 Website: <http://www.bfhd.wa.gov>

EPA, “A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture and Your Home,” <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html>

New York City Department of Health, “Guidelines on Assessment and Remediation of Fungi in Indoor Environments,” <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/epi/moldrpt1.shtml>

MOLD

home safety series



www.bfhd.wa.gov

