

Often-Asked Questions Regarding Mold Concerns

Here are some basic points to consider about mold problems, health impacts, and testing. A list of Web sites is also included for more information.

1. Pay particular attention to the cause of the mold and where it's located. ***If mold present, it is very important to locate the moisture source, fix it quickly, and remove the mold.*** If members of the family are having reactions to the mold, these reactions will continue until this is done. In short: As long as the moisture source is not fixed and there are on-going problems with moisture, the mold will be present. As long as the mold is present, health impacts are possible.
2. Are health problems occurring because of the mold or from other sources? You may need to consult with a doctor on this. Keep written documentation of when the problems are better and when they are worse. Where was the person when they felt better or felt worse? What were the symptoms? Does the person get better when they leave the house for a period of time? (Sometimes it takes the symptoms a while to subside.)
3. Where is the mold located? It may be visible or it may be hidden. Does the area smell musty? If you don't see mold but the area is musty or has an earthy smell, you may have hidden mold problems. It's important to locate or identify the source of moisture that "feeds" the mold. Is the air simply too humid? If so, a dehumidifier or ventilating fans may be necessary. Has the area flooded or have there been recent leaks or moisture problems? Is the roof or the foundation of the building leaking? Is the home built over a crawl space and if so, has this area been checked for mold? Has the bathtub or washing machine overflowed with water seeping in-between the walls? Check behind wallboard, under carpet, around water pipe entrances, behind vinyl wallcoverings, etc. Mold is often hidden and hard to find. If necessary, hire a certified mold inspector to help locate the mold. They also have suggestions on who might be able to fix the moisture problem and remove the mold if it's a large area (25 square feet or more)
4. What about home test kits for mold? This question is often asked. There has been a proliferation of sites that have appeared through the Internet advertising home test kits for mold. They are also available at many hardware, home supply, and home improvement businesses. (Sometimes these test kits are found in the yard and garden department and sometimes in the household department.) How about their accuracy? In short, they are not as reliable as actual testing by professionals. Home test kits can simply tell if mold spores are present, but not what kind of mold, how much there is, or where the moisture problem is. Most experts recommend that people not spend the money on home test kits. They feel that if there is a mold problem, it's best to simply spend the money getting rid of the mold and fixing the moisture problem
5. How about testing in general? Again, testing is not needed nor recommended for mold and mildew in most situations. Occasionally, testing is useful to answer questions about illness or health concerns. Some insurance companies and legal services may require sampling for

documentation. Professional mold remediation contractors may test before and after cleanup to assess their effects. In most situations, however, experts recommend that if mold is visible or a musty smell is present that indicates mold is in the area. The best plan of action is to locate the contaminated areas, remove the mold, and fix the moisture/water problem to prevent its return. Spend your money on the removal rather than the testing.

6. When should professional assistance be used for mold removal? It is highly recommended that trained professionals remove larger areas of mold (25 to 30 square feet or more). If the area is small (5 square feet or less), most individuals will probably be able to remove the mold themselves using proper precautions. Some experts recommend 10 to 15 square feet as cut-off points between when you can attempt mold removal yourself and when to call in professional assistance.

The best way to avoid mold hazards for large flooded areas is to hire a licensed, trained and reputable water damage and mold remediation firm. After a major flood, however, professional help may be difficult to find quickly. Also, many homeowners' insurance policies do not cover mold damage or mold remediation costs, so many residents face having to do the cleanup themselves.

If you are working with mold, protect yourself and other family members from mold spores and chemicals used in cleaning and disinfecting surfaces. Anyone working with mold removal should wear proper protection, including a respiratory mask, rubber gloves, and eye protection. Use caution and follow instructions on labels when working with household chemicals, such as chlorine bleach and disinfectants. Be sure to follow all recommended procedures and precautions.

Use your judgment as to your own sensitivity and potential health impacts in removing mold. Remember that mold can be a trigger for asthma episodes. Anyone with asthma, allergies to mold, immune-compromised or respiratory medical conditions or other health problems should not attempt mold removal or be around in the area where it is being removed.

7. How can I locate someone for assistance with mold testing or clean-up? On-site testing can be done by certified industrial hygienists or other trained occupational health, safety, and environmental professionals. Check the Yellow Pages for listings under Environmental Consultants, Environmental Services, Industrial Hygiene Consultants, or Water Damage Restoration for companies and individuals that can assist with testing and/or clean-up of mold in homes and businesses. Some county health departments also do visual inspection and/or testing. Insurance companies may have recommendations for people who do testing or mold clean-up in your area. Be sure to check for individual or business qualifications or certification, costs for the services, and testing or clean-up procedures used before you hire anyone to do testing or mold clean-up.

8. Where can I get more information? Contact your county Extension office for more information or visit the following Web sites.

- Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service has a fact sheet with information on the detection, prevention, cleaning and disinfecting of mold problems.

HHF-LRA.168, "**Mold and Mildew**"

<http://www.ca.uky.edu/HES/fcs/FACTSHTS/HHF-LRA-168.PDF>

- The **Environmental Protection Agency** has new publications on 1) Mold, Moisture and Your Home and on 2) mold problems in commercial buildings.

EPA home page for mold:
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/index.html>

EPA Web site for Mold, Moisture and Your Home publication:
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html> (a PDF version also is available)
- **California Department of Health Services** has a comprehensive, easy-to-read publication on mold at the following Web address:

“Mold In My Home: What Can I Do?”
<http://www.cal-iaq.org/mold0107.htm>
- **Minnesota Department of Health** has an in-depth publication on mold, health concerns and moisture in the home at the following Web address:

“Mold in Homes”
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/mold/index.html>
- **Kansas Cooperative Extension Service** has a comprehensive publication with a list of solutions for prevention and removal of mold from various surfaces within the home.

MF-2141, **“Controlling Mold Growth in the Home”** by Marilyn Bode and Deanna Munson. Kansas State University, September 1995.
<http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/hous2/mf2141.pdf>
- The **American Industrial Hygiene Association** Web site contains information on educational resources and activities, current research, certified testing laboratories, and members within each state who work with the health and safety of businesses, families and communities. Industrial hygienists are trained and certified to do testing and work with indoor air quality problems, including mold and moisture concerns.

AIHA Web address for home page:
<http://www.aiha.org>

“The Facts about Mold” is an excellent publication containing information about mold, including testing, health effects, glossary of mold terms and much more.
<http://www.aiha.org/GovernmentAffairs-PR/html/oomold.htm>
- **National Association of Mold Professionals** has an excellent Web site with information on medical/health impacts of mold, insurance and legal implications, mold testing, and a toll free number for discussion and advice on mold problems.
<http://www.1877moldfree.com/index.html>

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