

Cleaning up mold in your home

Can mold cause health problems?

Mold has the potential to cause health problems. Mold produces 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. Mold 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.

Tips and techniques

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. Mold spores will not grow if moisture is not present.

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.

The tips and techniques presented here will help homeowners clean up most mold problems.

- Fix plumbing leaks and other water problems as soon as possible. Dry all items completely.
- Scrub mold off hard surfaces with detergent and water, and dry completely.
- Absorbent or porous materials, such as ceiling tiles and carpet, may have to be thrown away if they become moldy. Mold can grow on or fill in the empty spaces and crevices of these materials, so the mold may be difficult or impossible to remove completely.
- Do not paint or caulk over moldy surfaces. Clean up the mold and dry the surfaces before painting. Paint applied over moldy surfaces is likely to peel.
- If you are unsure about how to remove mold from an item, or if the item is expensive or has sentimental value, you may wish to consult a specialist. Look for specialists who are affiliated with professional organizations. Be sure to ask for – and check – references.

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. These respirators cost \$15 to \$25. Some N-95 respirators resemble a paper dust mask with a nozzle on the front, and others are made primarily of plastic or rubber and have removable cartridges that trap most of the mold spores from entering. In order to be effective, the respirator or mask must fit properly, so be sure to follow the instructions supplied with the respirator.

Avoid touching mold or moldy items with your bare hands.

Wear gloves. Long gloves that extend to the middle of the forearm are recommended. When working with water and a mild detergent, ordinary household rubber gloves may be used. If you are using a disinfectant, a biocide such as chlorine bleach or a strong cleaning solution, you should wear gloves made from natural rubber, neoprene, nitrile, polyurethane or PVC.

Avoid getting mold or mold spores in your eyes.

Wear goggles. Goggles that do not have ventilation holes are recommended.

Finding hidden mold problems

Finding hidden mold problems may be difficult and will require caution when the process involves disturbing potential sites of mold growth. For example, removing wallpaper in your home can lead to a massive release of spores if there is mold growing under the paper. If you believe that you may have a hidden mold problem, consider hiring an experienced professional.