MOLD

What is mold?
Mold is a group of fungi that will grow on different kinds of damp or decaying organic matter. In nature, molds use enzymes to eat dead plants and animals. If there is a moist environment and other proper conditions, molds can begin growing on materials commonly found in homes or other buildings.

How do people get exposed to mold?
Mold is everywhere in our environments, both indoors and outdoors, so most people are exposed to mold every day and everywhere. Generally this exposure does not cause problems for health people.

However, mold exposure can begin causing health problems when mold has begun to grow on a surface indoors. Molds use tiny spores to reproduce, which can become airborne and inhaled, potentially causing the following upper respiratory symptoms:

- **coughing, wheezing,**
- **runny nose/sinus problems,**
- **congestion**

Since human reaction to mold exposure is essentially an allergic reaction, people will vary in their sensitivity to the concentration of spores in the air. Vulnerable populations will be most at risk, particularly asthmatics - 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, and condensation) should be corrected. Keeping areas dry will prevent mold from growing.

Is there mold in my house?
For mold to grow, it needs moisture and a food source. Since there is usually plenty of organic material in a home to serve as food for the mold, the presence of water determines where mold will grow. If you can see visible mold growth or smell musty odors, then you may have mold growing in your home.

Should I test for mold?
Testing can be expensive and may not help you solve the problem. If you can see it or smell it, or if you know there are areas in your home that have water problems, there is a chance that mold is growing. Unless it is for legal or insurance purposes, testing/sampling for mold generally isn’t recommended.

Who can clean-up a mold problem?
Nebraska does not license the mold industry, so there is no specific training or procedure required by the state to undertake mold remediation. However, when determining who should conduct clean up, there are factors to consider, including the extent of contamination.

If the contaminated area is **approximately less than 10 square feet**:

- A homeowner can undertake cleanup, but should wear personal protective gear such as gloves, goggles, and an N-95 respirator. Only individuals who are free from allergy, asthma, and immune disorders should clean the area.
- No containment is necessary
- Follow the guidance below

If an area of mold is **greater than 10 square feet**:

Depending on the amount of contamination, greater amounts of PPE (personal protective equipment) as well as containment should be used. A homeowner may want to consider hiring a company to undertake cleanup when a large amount of mold is present.

PPE may include a full or half-face respirator with a HEPA filter, as well as a full suit of disposable clothing. Containment may include enclosing the area (sealing vents) and keeping it under negative pressure, potentially with a HEPA filtered exhaust.

How do I clean up a mold problem?

The following guidance is for a mold problem resulting from clean water, a leaking faucet or roof. When the water is contaminated, i.e. a sewage backup or a flood, different guidance will apply.

For any mold problem, the moisture source needs to be eliminated first. If the area is not adequately dried and kept dry, the mold will return.

In general, contaminated porous materials must be discarded and replaced, while contaminated non-porous materials can be cleaned and salvaged. The extent of contamination and the value of items may determine ultimately what is saved and what is not. Using a HEPA vacuum after thoroughly drying material can often help to salvage materials. Mold spores/fragments may remain in porous materials but will not grow if it is completely dried. The drawback to this is that mold that is not actively growing can still be inhaled and pose a health risk.

For a table listing common materials and whether they can be cleaned, see the booklet Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings.

Typically, if contaminated material can be cleaned, a detergent solution is adequate. The goal is not to kill the mold, it is to remove it. Therefore, biocides generally are not necessary or recommended. If a biocide is desired (such as bleach), remember to use it properly as it is toxic in itself. Ventilate the area, use a dilute solution, and follow instructions properly. **Never mix chlorine bleach with solutions containing ammonia; toxic fumes can be produced.**

For more detailed information on cleaning up a mold problem, see the booklet: Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings.

Additional information can be found on our website, or send us an email. We're more than happy answer any questions you may have.

Indoor Air Quality Program