

Fact Sheet

Mold

Mold After a Disaster



After natural disasters such as tornadoes and floods, excess moisture and standing water contribute to the growth of mold in homes and other buildings. When returning to a home that has been flooded, be aware that mold may be present and may be a health risk.

People at Greatest Risk from Mold

People with asthma, allergies, or other breathing conditions may be more sensitive to mold. People with immune suppression (such as people with HIV infection, cancer patients taking chemotherapy, and people who have received an organ transplant) are more susceptible to mold infections.

Possible Health Effects of Mold Exposure

People who are sensitive to mold may experience stuffy nose, irritated eyes, wheezing, or skin irritation. People allergic to mold may have difficulty in breathing and shortness of breath. People with weakened immune systems and with chronic lung diseases, such as obstructive lung disease, may develop mold infections in their lungs. If you or your family members have health problems after exposure to mold, contact your doctor or other health care provider.

Recognizing Mold

Mold may be recognized by:

- **Sight.** Are the walls and ceiling discolored, or do they show signs of mold growth or water damage?
- **Smell.** Is there a bad odor, such as a musty, earthy smell or a foul stench?

Safely Preventing Mold Growth

Clean up and dry out the building quickly (within 24 to 48 hours). Open doors and windows and use fans to dry out the building.

When in doubt, take it out! Remove all porous items that have been wet for more than 24 hours and that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried. These items can remain a source of mold growth and should be removed from the home. Porous, non-cleanable items include carpeting and carpet padding, upholstery, wallpaper, drywall, floor and ceiling tiles, insulation material, some clothing, leather, paper, wood, and food. Removal and cleaning are important because even dead mold may cause allergic reactions in some people.

- § To prevent mold growth, clean wet items and surfaces with detergent and water.
- § Homeowners may want to temporarily store items outside of the home until insurance claims can be filed.

If there is mold growth in the home, clean up the mold and fix any water problem, such as leaks in roofs, walls, or plumbing. Controlling moisture in the home is the most critical factor for preventing mold growth.

To *remove* mold growth from hard surfaces use commercial products, soap and water, or a bleach solution of no more than 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water. Use a stiff brush on rough surface materials such as concrete.

If using bleach to remove mold:

- § Never mix bleach with ammonia or other household cleaners. Mixing bleach with ammonia or other cleaning products will produce dangerous, toxic fumes
- § Open windows and doors to provide fresh air.
- § Wear non-porous gloves and protective eye wear.
- § If the area to be cleaned is more than 10 square feet, consult the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guide titled *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings*. Although focused on schools and commercial buildings, this document also applies to other building types. It can be obtained by going to the EPA web site at http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html.
- § Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using bleach or any other cleaning product.

If planning to be inside the building for a while or planning to clean up mold, a person should buy an N95 mask at the local home supply store and wear it while in the building. Make certain to follow instructions on the package for fitting the mask tightly to the face. If going back into the building for a short time and not cleaning up mold, does not need to wear an N95 mask.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES www.michigan.gov/mdhhs

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY www.epa.gov