

Mold and mildew are general terms used to describe kinds of fungus. There are hundreds of different types of molds that vary in color and appearance.

Molds are common in nature and can grow on rotting logs and fallen leaves, especially in moist, shady areas. Mold is also found indoors and can grow on foods, damp surfaces, cloth and other porous materials.

## Mold and Your Health

Some people are affected by everyday exposure to mold, but most people are not. For people who are affected, molds may cause:

- Eye, nose, throat or skin irritation
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Chest tightness
- Headache or fatigue

For people with asthma, mold can lead to asthma symptoms such as shortness of breath, chest tightness, wheezing, or even trigger an asthma attack.

People with mold allergies may have more severe reactions. Immune-compromised people and people with chronic lung illnesses, such as obstructive lung disease, may get serious infections in their lungs when they are exposed to mold.

Although rare, it is possible to contract a respiratory fungal infection—where fungus grows on or in body tissue. Seek medical attention for diagnosis and treatment of a fungal infection.

How a person might react to mold depends on several factors including the type of mold, the amount of mold present, the length and number of times a person is exposed, family history, and overall health status. People should consult their doctor with their personal health concerns or questions.

## Identifying Mold in Your Home

Mold grows in a wide range of places and is influenced by water or moisture, nutrition, light, oxygen and temperature. Indoors, the best way to identify mold growth is to find areas with water or moisture intrusion such as around leaks in roofs, windows or

pipes, or where there has been flooding. Other clues to mold growth are “musty” or “moldy” odors.

Areas without obvious water or moisture problems, but with high relative humidity may also support mold growth. Bathrooms without vents or windows, basements with dirt floors, and rooms into which kitchen and bathroom fans or clothes dryers are improperly vented are some examples.

Mold grows well on drywall, paper products, cardboard, ceiling tiles and wood products. Mold can also grow in dust, paints, wallpaper, insulation, carpet, fabric and upholstery.

## Preventing and Controlling Mold Growth

The key to controlling mold is to fix water or moisture problems. Mold can grow on materials within 48 hours of becoming wet, so try to dry them within 48 hours.

Steps you can take to prevent mold growth:

- Fix leaky roofs, gutters, windows and pipes.
- Direct water away from the building foundation to keep it from seeping into the basement.
- Use the right type and amount of insulation in areas above the ceiling and in exterior walls.
- Clean and dry thoroughly and quickly (within 48 hours) after flooding.
- Keep humidity levels at 40-60%.
- Vent clothes dryers and kitchen and bathroom fans to the outdoors.
- Use a dehumidifier in damp areas and empty the catch bucket frequently.



## Testing for Mold

Testing for mold is not necessary or recommended. Typically, testing does not provide any information that would change the action steps to fix the problem.

There are no standards that test results can be compared to, and therefore test results cannot be used to say a building is “safe” or “unsafe.”

## Fixing a Mold Problem

To fix a mold problem, you must find and correct the source of water or moisture.

These sources include plumbing or roof leaks, relative humidity, drainage or condensation. If the building condition or source of water or moisture is not corrected, mold growth will re-occur, despite any cleanup.

When you see mold growth or signs of water or moisture damage:

- Clean hard surfaces, objects and building materials with soap and water.
- Wash soft items that can be laundered (such as clothes or linens).
- Replace building materials and soft items that are damaged and cannot be laundered or washed.
- Following cleanup, vacuum the area with a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter vacuum.



The Vermont Department of Health recommends cleaning mold with soap and water and using appropriate personal protective equipment (gloves, eye protection and at least an N95 respirator).

## Carpets and Mold

Do not install carpeting on cement floors. Consider installing linoleum, tile or wood flooring rather than carpets in areas of high humidity.

If you wet clean your carpet, do not saturate it. Use hot water (140°F) and remove as much water as possible before drying. Then completely dry the carpet within 24 to 48 hours. Floor fans or dehumidifiers may help.

## Tenants and Employees

If you are a tenant or employee, speak with your landlord or employer about mold problems. If the problem is serious and conditions persist, a tenant may want to call the Town Health Officer, and an employee may wish to contact the Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration (VOSHA).

## Hiring a Contractor

Usually a contractor is not needed for a small mold problem of less than 10 square feet. For more than 100 square feet, you will probably want to hire a contractor. For areas between 10 and 100 square feet, use your judgment to decide.

There are no federal or Vermont certifications or licenses for mold remediation or testing. General contractors and home inspectors often can identify mold and moisture problems and suggest corrective actions. General contractors may also be able to fix the conditions that are causing the mold growth.

Some contractors specialize in mold cleanup and may be well suited for challenging cases of mold growth. As with any contractor, get references to assess the contractor's experience, past work success and the satisfaction of their past clients.

## No "Black Mold" Species

No species of mold is named "black mold." Many kinds of mold may be black, and the color of mold does not describe what type it is or how hazardous it is. *Stachybotrys chartarum* (*S. chartarum*) is a mold species that often is incorrectly called "black mold." It has also been featured in news reports as more toxic than other molds. Currently it is not known whether low exposure to *S. chartarum* causes more illness than exposure to other mold species.

Whether an indoor environment is contaminated with *S. chartarum* or any other species of mold, the recommendations remain the same:

- Address the building condition or source of water that has allowed mold to grow.
- Clean mold in a safe manner.
- Replace building materials as necessary.
- Wear personal protective equipment.
- Consult professional help when needed.

## More Information

Mold resources for school, home and workplace:

[www.epa.gov/mold](http://www.epa.gov/mold)

[www.cdc.gov/mold](http://www.cdc.gov/mold)

[www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib101003.html](http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib101003.html)