

Mold

What is mold?

Molds are fungi that can be found both indoors and outdoors. No one knows how many species of fungi exist but estimates range from tens of thousands to perhaps three hundred thousand or more. Molds grow best in warm, damp, and humid conditions, and spread and reproduce by making spores. Mold spores can survive harsh environmental conditions, such as dry conditions, that do not support normal mold growth.



Where are molds found?

Molds are found in virtually every environment and can be detected, both indoors and outdoors, year round. Mold growth is encouraged by warm and humid conditions. Outdoors they can be found in shady, damp areas or places where leaves or other

vegetation is decomposing. Indoors they can be found where humidity levels are high, such as basements or showers.

Is mold causing me to feel sick?

There are other indoor air contaminants that can occur in a home, causing health problems similar to mold exposure. Exposure to tobacco smoke, pet allergens, carbon monoxide from faulty furnaces and hot water heaters, and poor sanitation can all cause health problems for residents. If you are experiencing adverse health symptoms, it is important that you see your physician for a proper evaluation and diagnosis. Your physician may refer you to a specialist, such as an allergist, for additional tests. If you seem to feel better when you are away from your home for several hours, this may be an indication that there is a contaminant in your home. If you and your physician suspect an indoor air quality issue is causing your symptoms, and you are unable to identify and clean up the source of the contamination, you can call an indoor air specialist. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has a list of Indoor Air Quality Consultants. The list can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/mold/consultants.htm>

How can people decrease mold exposure?

Sensitive individuals should avoid areas that are likely to have mold, such as compost piles, cut grass, and wooded areas. Inside homes, mold growth can be slowed by controlling humidity levels and ventilating showers and cooking areas. If there is mold growth in your home, you should clean up the mold and fix the water problem. Mold growth can be removed from hard surfaces with commercial products, soap and water, or a bleach solution of no more than 1 cup of household laundry bleach in 1 gallon of water.

If you choose to use bleach to clean up 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. You can get it 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.

Specific Recommendations:

- Keep humidity levels as low as you can—no higher than 50%--all day long. An air conditioner or dehumidifier will help you keep the level low. Bear in mind that humidity levels change over the course of a day with changes in the moisture in the air and the air temperature, so you will need to check the humidity levels more than once a day.
- Use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier during humid months.
- Be sure the home has adequate ventilation, including exhaust fans.
- Add mold inhibitors to paints before application.
- Clean bathrooms with mold killing products.
- Do not carpet bathrooms and basements.
- Remove or replace previously soaked carpets and upholstery.

What do I do if I have mold?

Testing - If you can see or smell a mold problem, testing or sampling is typically not necessary. It is more important to identify and remediate the moisture source and clean up the mold, than to spend the time

and money on testing. In addition, there are no agreed-upon, health-based standards for human exposure to mold or mold spores. Testing is only indicated in rare instances and should be discussed with an indoor air quality specialist.

Cleanup - Small areas of mold growth on nonporous surfaces can usually be cleaned by the removal of the gross mold buildup, followed by application of a simple bleach solution. The affected area(s) should be allowed to dry thoroughly (fact sheet detailing the steps involved in mold cleanup). Extensive cleanup of large areas may require the use of a mold/water cleanup service and the removal of mold-contaminated surfaces (including drywall, carpeting, or wood flooring).

Seeking professional help - If you suspect you have an indoor air quality problem, you may want to discuss it with an indoor air quality specialist. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has a list of Indoor Air Quality Consultants. The list can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/mold/consultants.htm>. If you are a tenant having difficulties with your landlord, you can call the Tenants' Rights and Responsibilities at 608-224-4976 or Toll-free in WI at 800-422-7128.

