

What is mold?

Molds are forms of fungi that are found naturally in the environment. Molds are in the soil, and on dead and decaying matter. Outdoors, molds play a key role in the breakdown of leaves, wood and other plant debris. Molds come in a variety of colors, including green, black, white, brown and orange. Molds can appear fuzzy or in slimy streaks. There is often a musty or earthy odor around molds.



What causes mold to grow inside homes?

Molds make tiny spores to reproduce, just as some plants produce seeds. Indoors, these mold spores move through the air and settle on surfaces. When mold spores land on a damp spot, they may begin to grow and multiply.

Molds need moisture and a food source. Good food sources for molds are cloth, wood, wallboard and insulation, but molds can grow on almost anything. Water or moisture is the factor that limits mold growth. When there is a wet surface or material that is not dried or discarded promptly (for example, water discharged from a burst pipe), molds can grow within 24 to 48 hours in the area.



How can molds affect my health?

Molds produce spores, which are invisible and small enough to travel through the air and into your lungs. You can also be exposed to molds by skin contact.

The most common health problem from molds is allergy symptoms, including:

- Runny nose, scratchy throat, itchy eyes, sneezing, and in more severe cases, wheezing and coughing.
- Wheezing is a serious symptom that may mean asthma, and should be evaluated by a doctor.

Although some molds can produce toxins under certain conditions, research so far has not shown what levels can clearly cause serious health effects from indoor air exposure. If you think you have symptoms related to exposure to molds, you should see your doctor.

People sensitive to molds should not participate in cleaning mold from surfaces. If you are cleaning up mold, wear plastic gloves, a filter mask (N-95 rated) and goggles.

How do I clean up mold in my home?

A small area (less than 3 feet by 3 feet) of surface mold growing on places such as hard plastic, tile, wood and some drywall, can usually be cleaned by the homeowner (see below). For other items like upholstered furniture and carpets, a wet vacuum or steam cleaner may be used on small areas. Consult a professional for larger areas and for general assistance if you are not sure about what to do. Take the following steps to clean mold from hard surfaces in the home:

- First, fix any obvious water leaks or sources of moisture.
- Damp wipe or scrub thoroughly all contaminated surfaces with warm water and a non-ammonia soap/detergent.
- Rinse and thoroughly dry the cleaned surface of water and moisture.

If desired, you can use a bleach solution to disinfect the area after cleaning. This step does not prevent mold growth from reoccurring. **Do not mix bleach with ammonia products. A toxic gas will form. Bleach may cause discoloration. Test a small area first.**

- Wear gloves. Mix one-half cup of bleach per gallon of water and apply to surface. A spray bottle, mop or sponge can be used. Ventilate the area.
- Remove excess bleach solution and then allow surface to thoroughly dry.

Mold prevention tips for the home

- Keep the humidity level in the home below 60%, ideally between 30% and 50%.
- Use exhaust fans while cooking and showering. Make sure fans vent to the outdoors.
- Ventilate and or dehumidify attics, crawl spaces, and basements.
- Keep bathrooms dry and well ventilated.
- Clean, dry or remove anything from your home that is water damaged within 24 to 48 hours.
- Watch for condensation and wet spots.



For more information contact:

**EPA Indoor Air Quality Information
Clearinghouse at 1-800-438-4318**

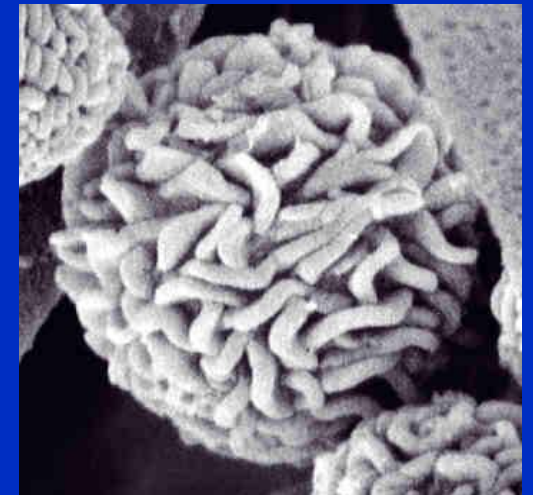
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Sources: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Minnesota
Department of Health, and U.S. Army Center for Health
Promotion and Preventive Medicine

What Can I do About Mold in My Home?



A mature spore of *Stachybotrys
Chartarum* as seen under a scanning
electron micrograph



**Georgia Department of Human Resources
Division of Public Health
Environmental Health and Injury
Prevention Branch**