



REDUCE YOUR EXPOSURE TO MOLD

NEW MEXICO
DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH

Web: www.nmhealth.org/eheb/

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Epidemiology and Response Division
Environmental Health Epidemiology

Mold: Frequently Asked Questions

Is something growing in your bathroom, water heater closet, window seals, or under your kitchen sink? You have likely found mold. So now what? The first step is removing the mold. Next is controlling for moisture. Take the time to understand what mold is, how it grows, and how to clean it up. To get you started the following may answer your immediate questions about mold in New Mexico.

Health Effects Related to Mold

Can mold affect my health?

Everyone is exposed to some amount of mold every day. Not everyone is mold sensitive. However, if there are active mold spores in the home (you may notice a musty smell), workplace or outdoors, over time these conditions can cause or worsen health effects.

The following types of individuals are most likely to be affected by mold exposure:

- The immune systems of infants and children are more sensitive to the environment around them than adults. The likelihood for long term health damage in small children increases when they are exposed to moldy environments on a daily or routine basis.
- The elderly, especially those with frail immune systems are most vulnerable to pneumonia or other respiratory infections when exposed to moldy conditions.



- Allergy sufferers are more susceptible to experiencing allergy symptoms when exposed to moldy conditions.
- People with respiratory or chronic health conditions. These conditions often worsen with exposure to mold.

What should I do if someone in my household is sensitive to mold?

Consult a health care provider. They can tell you if the symptoms may be mold allergy-related.

Keep anyone who is known to be sensitive to mold away from the mold to reduce exposure. You may need to find temporary living arrangements for them if the mold problem is large enough.

For more details go to www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html

- People diagnosed with asthma may be more susceptible to asthma episodes when exposed to moldy conditions.

What are the health symptoms of mold exposure?

According to a 2004 Institutes of Medicine Report, Damp Indoor Spaces and Health, the only health outcomes with sufficient evidence of an association with mold include upper respiratory (nose and throat) symptoms, cough, wheeze, and asthma symptoms among sensitized individuals.

Molds produce allergens, irritants, and sometimes toxins that may cause adverse health reactions. The types and severity of symptoms depend on the types of mold present, extent of the mold exposure and an individual's existing allergies to mold.

If you notice health effects related to mold exposure, see your health care provider.

Mold and Your Home

What is mold and where is it found?

Molds are fungi that occur in the natural environment. Their role in nature is to cause the decay of dead plant and animal matter. Molds create tiny spores to reproduce, just like some plants produce seeds. These microscopic spores travel through the air and when they land on a damp spot they may begin to grow and feed on organic matter to survive.

Although mold growth outdoors is a good and necessary process, mold growth indoors is a potential for major problems and should be avoided.

Mold in the Home

How can mold get in my home?

Molds will grow wherever they have enough moisture, nutrients and the appropriate temperatures. There are many kinds of molds and people are in contact with **mold spores** every day, usually by touching them or breathing them in.

Avoiding mold spores indoors is impossible because they are always in the air and get indoors through open doorways, windows, vents, and heating and air conditioning systems. Mold spores can also attach themselves to clothing, shoes, bags, and pets and be carried indoors.

What conditions cause mold and mildew indoors?

Mold needs two things to grow:

- Wet or damp conditions;
- A nutrition source, such as leaves, food, wood, wallboard, insulation, ceiling tiles, paper products (such as stacks of newspapers or magazines) or other organic-based material such as dust, paints, carpet, fabric and upholstery.

Common areas for excess moisture in the home are:

- leaks in the roof, windows, and plumbing;
- steam in the kitchen and bathrooms with poor or no exhaust ventilation,
- moisture from humidifiers

Once mold growth has started, even with thorough drying, the moisture in the air may be enough to sustain mold.

What should I do if I find or suspect moldy conditions in my home?

If you see a discoloration or growth on surfaces in your bathroom, water heater closet, on your window sills, under your kitchen sink, on your baseboards or under rugs and carpeting, it may be mold.

- Fix any plumbing leaks and other water problems as soon as possible. Dry all items completely. Mold will not grow without moisture.
- Scrub mold off hard surfaces with detergent and water and dry completely. Use of biocides such as chlorine bleach is not recommended as a routine practice. **Please note:** Dead mold (treated mold) can still cause allergic reactions in some individuals, such as those who suffer from asthma or other respiratory disorders. It is **not enough to simply kill the mold, it must also be removed.**
- Avoid breathing in mold or mold spores. To limit your exposure to mold use an N-95 respirator, available at many hardware stores.
- Wear gloves. Avoid touching mold or moldy items with your bare hands. We recommend wearing long gloves that extend to the middle of the forearms.
- Wear goggles. Avoid getting mold or mold spores in your eyes. We recommend wearing goggles without ventilation holes.
- Throw away moldy, porous materials like ceiling tiles and carpet.
- To contract for extensive mold clean-up (i.e. greater than 10 square feet of moldy material), check the Yellow Pages under *Restoration*. See also www.nmhealth.org/eheb/.



Common places for mold growth include storage space underneath sinks.



For large areas, consult with remediation professionals.

Mold Prevention

How can I keep my home dry and mold-free?

The key to mold control is moisture control. After you have repaired the leaks and cleaned up the mold:

1. Regularly inspect roofs, foundations, windows, and plumbing for new leaks.
2. Homes and buildings should be maintained at low (30-50%) relative humidity.
3. Use humidifiers as recommended by the manufacturer.
4. Use exhaust fans when cooking, dishwashing, showering and laundering.
5. Inspect and repair your ventilation system.
6. Increase air circulation by moving furniture several inches away from the walls.
7. If possible, remove carpeting from bathrooms.
8. If possible, install double-pane windows or insulation to prevent moisture buildup.
9. If you rent, please refer to the NM Department of Health's [Mold Remediation Guidelines for Tenants and Property Owners](http://www.nmhealth.org/eheb/) at www.nmhealth.org/eheb/.



Signs of leaks include water stains on walls, ceilings and floorboards.

Who regulates or has jurisdiction to enforce the abatement of mold?

New Mexico does not have laws or state agencies that regulate mold or have the jurisdiction to enforce abatement. No federal indoor air quality standards exist for mold.

I rent a house. What are my rights and obligations as a tenant if I discover mold in it?

If you currently rent a house, house modular, mobile home or apartment, contact the Tenant/Landlord Hotline at 1-800-348-9370 or 983-8447 for information about your rights and obligations as a tenant.

If you are planning to rent a house, modular, mobile home or apartment, it is a good idea to check the structure for mold problems and leaks before signing a lease. Work with the landlord or property manager to have these problems corrected before you move in.

Also refer to the NM Department of Health's [Mold Remediation Guidelines for Tenants and Property Owners](http://www.health.state.nm.us/eheb/) at www.health.state.nm.us/eheb/.

I am buying a house. Should I have it inspected?

If you are purchasing a new home it may be worth the expense to have a mold inspection - that is to have the home checked for mold, especially in places not easily visible, as well as for leaks, prior to buying or moving in. Your real estate agent can advise you of this.

Mold type testing

Should I have my home tested for mold?

Neither the New Mexico Department of Health nor the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have any recommendations for routine mold testing. The results are difficult to interpret and the process is costly.

Testing may not change what you need to do because no matter what results you get, you still have to remove the cause of the mold and get it cleaned up. See www.cdc.gov/mold/faqs.htm for details.

In most cases, if visible mold is present, testing is unnecessary. It is more important to get rid of the mold than to spend time and money to find out what kind of mold it is.

Will the State test my home?

The Department of Health provides health information about mold and mold cleanup but does not test, clean, or conduct environmental health assessments for mold. For testing, assessments, and cleanup check your local "yellow pages" under [Laboratories-Analytical](#) or [Environmental Testing](#), and [Mold Inspections](#).

If I test for mold, what do the results mean?

If you get a mold assessment from a commercial company, the results should compare indoor air samples to outdoor air samples. Ask the company for an explanation of the results, as neither the Health Department nor the CDC will interpret these results. Keep in mind **no state or federal regulations exist for indoor mold.**

Indoor mold in everyday places

Work Sites

What if I'm exposed to mold at work?

If you feel that you are having health problems due to mold or any other environmental hazard in the workplace, you should take the following steps to remedy the situation:



- Talk with your doctor or other health care provider and, if mold is suspected, report your problems to the company physician, nurse, or health and safety officer.
- Speak to your employer about the problem and remind them that some people are more susceptible to the health effects of mold than others.
- Inform the building management of the mold through proper channels.
- Cooperate with management during an indoor air quality investigation to aid the process of identifying the moisture source and solving the problem.

For advice or to make a report (*anonymous reports are accepted*) contact the New Mexico Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office in Santa Fe at 505 827-4320.

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Resources

Where can I get more information about mold, mold remediation and health effects ?

Visit these websites:

EHEB: www.nmhealth.org/eheb/

CDC: www.cdc.gov/mold

EPA: www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html

OSHA: www.osha.gov/SLTC/molds/recognition.html

HUD: www.hud.gov/offices/lead/

NCHH: www.nchh.org/

Schools

What if there is mold in a school?

If you are a parent or community member contact the school principal first. The principal has the authority and responsibility to contact and work with the superintendent's office to fix such problems.

It is recommend that school personnel and students follow proper channels within the school operating procedures in reporting mold and other environmental concerns.

Businesses

What if there is mold in a business?

- For non-food businesses, like hotels and retail, contact your local city council or manager. See www.newmexico.gov/government.php. After you find the link you need, scroll down for a list of phone numbers.
- For businesses that sell food, like grocery stores or restaurants, contact the New Mexico Environment Department food program. See www.nmenv.state.nm.us/fod/Food_Program/fieldoffices.html for a list of phone numbers. In Albuquerque, contact the City of Albuquerque Environmental Health Department by dialing 311.

Mold Control Quick Tips:

- Keep It Dry
- If Wet, Dry Quickly
- Maintain, Clean and Repair Regularly



Mold tends to grow in areas with high moisture such as near this air conditioner vent.



Signs of a leak include water damage such as water stains, sagging walls and tiles, which can lead to mold problems.