

Household Mold

What is mold and what conditions favor its growth?

Mold is an everyday term for a broad group of fungi that are present in the environment—both indoors and outdoors. Molds spread through microscopic spores that are commonly found in homes. These spores can grow on nearly every type of indoor material or surface that is wet, so the key to preventing mold growth is to prevent moisture problems.

How do molds affect people?

Exposure to mold may cause a variety of health problems, particularly in people with mold allergies. The health effects vary greatly, depending on the person, the amount and duration of mold exposure, and other variables. Molds can irritate the eyes, skin, nose, throat, and lungs. People who are allergic to mold may experience coughing, wheezing, runny nose, red eyes, and/or skin rashes. More severe reactions like fever, shortness of breath, and asthma attacks may occur in people with more serious mold allergies. People with a greatly weakened immune system are at risk of developing serious respiratory infections. Those who are concerned that they might be experiencing symptoms due to mold exposure should consult their health care provider.

How much mold in the home is too much?

Because there are no health standards for mold and the health effects of mold are not well understood, it is safest to treat any indoor mold growth as a “potential health hazard” that needs to be corrected. Molds should be removed and the moisture problem that led to mold growth should be fixed.

Is it important to find out what type of mold is present in my home before cleaning it up?

No. All molds should be treated the same with respect to potential health risks and removal. Standards for determining what constitutes an unhealthy amount of mold have not been established.

What is “toxic mold”?

Many molds can produce potentially harmful substances, including allergens, mycotoxins, or other compounds. The term “toxic mold” is inaccurate—indoor molds are unlikely to be life-threatening. Much concern has been raised about a certain type of mold, *Stachybotrys chartarum*, which the media labeled as a “killer” mold because it was found in homes of infants who died of an unusual lung disease; however, no definitive connection between the mold and the illness was identified.

Does any federal, state, or local agency inspect or test homes for mold in Alaska?

No. There is no state or local agency that inspects or tests homes for mold or that interprets household mold test results.

What can I do to fix a mold problem in my home?

Mold cannot form or grow without a constant source of water. These sources may include steam from the shower, condensation on windows, a leaky roof or pipe, improper weather sealing, or flooding.

To control mold growth in the home:

- Keep humidity levels as low as possible, ideally no higher than 50%
- Promptly fix leaky roofs, windows, and pipes
- Ventilate shower, laundry, and cooking areas
- Thoroughly and quickly clean up and dry out after a flood (ideally within 24 to 48 hours)

To clean up and remove indoor mold growth:

1. Identify and fix the moisture problem.
2. Dry all wet materials as soon as possible; use fans and dehumidifiers, if needed.
3. Remove and dispose of mold-contaminated materials.
 - Items that have absorbed moisture (porous materials) and have mold growing on them, such as drywall, insulation, plaster, carpet, ceiling tiles, paper, and non-solid wood products should be bagged and thrown away.
 - Contaminated upholstery and fabrics, such as carpeting, floor padding, drapes, and furniture should be thrown away if they cannot be thoroughly cleaned.
4. Mold growing on semi- or non-porous materials, such as hard plastic, concrete, glass, and solid wood can usually be cleaned.
 - Scrub all contaminated surfaces with a stiff brush, hot water and a non-ammonia soap/detergent or commercial cleaner. The use of a chemical like chlorine bleach is generally not recommended as routine practice during mold cleanup. However, if you choose to use a disinfectant like chlorine bleach, mix no more than 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water.
 - Bleach can irritate the eyes, nose, throat, and skin, so provide ventilation and protect the skin and eyes (see below).
 - Bleach can also corrode and damage materials, so test the bleach solution on a small area before using.
 - *Never mix bleach with ammonia or another household cleaner*, as this can cause the formation of toxic chlorine gas.
 - Collect excess cleaning liquid with a wet/dry vacuum, mop, or sponge.
 - Rinse the area with clean water and collect excess rinse water.
 - If the contaminated area is more than 10 square feet (i.e., a 3 ft. by 3 ft. patch), consult the EPA guidelines on mold [remediation in schools and commercial buildings](#) (see the resources section below).
5. After cleaning has removed all visible mold, disinfecting surfaces (if desired) can help kill any remaining mold missed by the cleaning.
 - Mix ¼ to ½ cup bleach in 1 gallon of water and apply to cleaned surfaces with a sponge or other method that does not leave excess water.
 - Collect any run-off with a clean wet/dry vacuum, sponge, or mop.
 - Do not rinse or wipe the treated area; allow surface to dry.
6. Continue to look for signs of a moisture problem or return of mold growth.
7. If mold returns, repeat steps 1 to 6; re-growth may be a signal that the material should be removed or that the moisture problem is not fixed.

To protect yourself and others while cleaning up mold:

- Wear rubber gloves, rubber boots, eye goggles, and an N95 or N100 type disposable mask (if you are sensitive to mold, a more protective mask may be needed)
- Wear outer clothing that can be easily removed in the work area and washed or tossed out
- Plan and perform all work to minimize the amount of mold disturbed or dust generated (see the resources section below on "[Mold in Homes](#)" for more information on this topic)

What can I do about mold in my rented home or apartment?

- If you see or smell mold in your rented home/apartment, it should be cleaned up and the moisture problem should be fixed. Inform your landlord verbally and in writing of the problem as soon as possible. Generally, the landlord is responsible for repairing moisture problems and cleaning up mold, unless it is an issue related to the tenant's behavior (e.g., using humidifiers or not using the bathroom or kitchen fans).
- There are no state or federal laws that deal specifically with mold in rental units. The rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords with respect to mold can vary depending on the terms of the lease contract, the cause of the mold growth, and local (e.g., municipal) codes. For example, local property maintenance codes require that rental units be habitable and in good repair. If a rental unit becomes uninhabitable (not livable), this might constitute a breach of the lease. Refer to the publication, [*The Alaska Landlord & Tenant Act: What it Means to You*](#), in the resources section below for more information.
- If you live in federal or state financed housing or are a low-income tenant, you may be able to get help from the Alaska Housing and Urban Development Office (for federal housing projects) or the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (for state housing programs), depending on your situation. Low-income tenants may also call Alaska Legal Services for help (see resources section below).

Additional Resources:

1. A Brief Guide to Mold in the Workplace (U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration, OSHA): <http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib101003.html>
2. A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home (EPA): <http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html>
3. About Mold and Moisture (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, HUD): http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/healthy_homes/healthyhomes/mold
4. Alaska Dept. of Health and Social Services, Section of Epidemiology, 907-269-8000
5. Alaska Dept. of Law, Consumer Protection Unit, Landlord and Tenant Information: <http://www.law.state.ak.us/departments/civil/consumer/landlord-tenant.html>, 907-269-5200, 888-576-2529 to request a copy
6. Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC), Division of Public Housing: 907-330-8428, 800-478-2432
7. Alaska HUD, Anchorage Field Office: 907-677-9800, 877-302-9800
8. Alaska Legal Services (free civil legal assistance for low-income Alaskans): <http://www.alsc-law.org/>, 800-478-2230
9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/mold/>, 800-232-4636
10. HUD Multifamily Housing Complaint Line: 800-685-8470
11. Mold in Homes (MN Dept. of Health): <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/mold/index.html>
12. Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings (EPA): http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html
13. Municipality of Anchorage, Dept. of Health and Human Services, Environmental Services: <http://www.muni.org/departments/health/environment/pages/default.aspx>, 907-343-4200
14. Municipality of Anchorage, Code Violation Hotline: 907-343-4141
15. Municipality of Anchorage, Dept. of Community Development, Building Safety Program: <http://www.muni.org/departments/ocpd/development/bsd/pages/default.aspx>, 907-343-8301
16. Testing for Mold, and Guidelines for Selecting an Indoor Air Quality Consultant (MN Dept. of Health): <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/mold/moldtest.html>
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/selectingiaq.html>
17. U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): <http://www.epa.gov/mold/>