

MOLD: HOW IT AFFECTS OUR HOME AND OUR HEALTH

June 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Public Health

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What is mold and where can I find it?

Mold is a type of fungal growth. It is made of tiny organisms that can be found on various kinds of decaying matter that contain moisture. Different species of mold can be found in both outdoor and indoor environments.

Molds and other fungi such as mushrooms are typically found outdoors and are important because they help break down decomposed plants and recycle the nutrients into the environment.

Mold found indoors usually looks like a stain that can be seen in a variety of colors, such as green, gray, white, brown, black, or red.



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How are mold and moisture related?

To grow and reproduce, mold only needs food, such as leaves, wood, paper or dust (organic matter), and water. Organic matter is found in most environments; mold grows depends on whether there is moisture present. By fixing moisture problems, you can keep mold from growing in your home.

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How might I be exposed to mold?

Mold grows and reproduces by feeding on organic matter (e.g., wood, paper, cotton, dust, etc.) and moisture. If moisture is present, mold can grow – even in your home. For example, bathrooms in homes either have windows or another type of ventilation system (e.g. fan) to allow steam from showers or sinks to escape. To reduce the chance of mold growth, it is important to have enough air flow by opening windows or using ventilation. Air flow helps reduce moisture in areas that usually contain water, such as the kitchen and bathroom. As mold grows, it releases tiny spores that travel through the air. Exposure to mold occurs by breathing in the spores. Everyone is exposed to some amount of mold every day but being exposed to large amounts of mold or small amounts over an extensive period can lead to health risks.

4 How can mold affect my health?

Exposure to mold spores can cause different reactions. For those who have allergies, it may cause allergic reactions, referred to as hay fever. While for people with asthma, mold may trigger asthma attacks. Also, overexposure to mold in the home makes people more likely to get respiratory infections, and in extreme cases, it may weaken the immune system. High risk groups, such as infants, young children, elders, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to develop severe symptoms from exposure to mold.



5 How can I prevent mold?

To eliminate problems as quickly as possible, on a regular basis, inspect your surroundings and look for signs of excessive moisture or water damage. Make sure you repair any leaks and check to see if your home has enough ventilation. If you experience flooding, thoroughly clean and dry areas in your home. If you can see mold, clean it up. If you can smell a musty odor, throw out any objects that contain this odor as it may be a health risk. **Remember**, you do not need to know what type of mold is growing in your home as these tests may be expensive and unnecessary.

Ways you can detect mold:

- Feel for soft spots on surfaces. Does the ceiling sag in any of the rooms in your home?
- Warped or cracked flooring. Do you feel gradual rises underneath the carpet? Are there any gaps between the floorboards?

6 I think my home contains mold, now what?

1. If you are not the owner of your home, notify the property owner or manager of all water leaks (roofing or plumbing) or any spot in your home that contains excessive moisture.
2. Open windows or use ventilation fans to prevent moisture from building up in bathrooms, kitchens, or any other area of your home where moisture is present.
3. As soon as possible, clean up any surface that contains moisture or mildew, using proper safety gear.



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What can be kept and what should be thrown away?

It is important to eliminate the source of the moisture and to clean up mold quickly and safely when materials have become saturated with moisture, otherwise, the mold will return. If moisture has saturated the material, such as a drywall or porous material like carpet and home furnishings, the items may need to be replaced, or the mold will return quickly.

Deciding what to keep:

- Keep items and materials that do not absorb water (glass, plastic, metal, or ceramics) and can be cleaned of mold.
- Keep items that do not have mold on them and do not smell moldy.
- Some washable, moldy items like clothing and bedding may be cleaned well enough to keep, so it may be worth trying.
- Keep throw rugs that have gotten wet only if they can be thoroughly washed and do not smell moldy once they dry.

Remove and throw out:

- Wet materials that absorb water and look or smell moldy, like drywall or gypsum board, ceiling tiles, drapes, upholstered furniture, and products made from particleboard.
- Materials that have dried but look or smell moldy.
 - Moldy wall-to-wall carpet can be hard to clean well. Throw away the carpet if the backing, or padding is moldy or has a moldy smell.
 - If there has been flooding, remove drywall/gypsum board to a level above the high-water mark. Look inside the wall space and throw out any material, like insulation, that is wet, moldy, or has a moldy smell.

If tightly bagged or enclosed, moldy items can be put in the household trash. Materials that have lead or asbestos in them must be taken to a household hazardous waste program. Some materials that might have lead or asbestos are:

- Ceiling tiles
- Vinyl floor tiles
- Painted wood, plaster, or drywall/gypsum board in homes built before 1978



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How do I clean up mold?

Mold which appears as a result of everyday activities, such as showering, is the responsibility of the tenant to clean. Mold growth due to plumbing leaks, roof leaks, leaks from around windows, or sprinklers hitting the side of the house, are the responsibility of the landlord. When cleaning surfaces of mold growth, it is always important to avoid breathing in mold and wear protective gear.

When cleaning mold, close off the work area to keep dust and spores from spreading to other areas:

- Close the door or use plastic sheets to separate the room.
- Set up a fan to push the air out through a window or door to the outside.
- Using hot water, sponges or rags, scrub the entire moldy area with a non-ammonia soap or detergent, or a commercial cleaner; scrub until all mold is gone.
- Use a stiff brush or cleaning pad on cement-block walls and other uneven surfaces.
- Rinse cleaned items with water and dry well.

Avoid breathing in mold: Wear an N-95 respirator (available at many hardware stores), and make sure it fits tightly around the face. Work for short periods of time and take breaks where you can breathe fresh air.

Wear protective gear: Make sure you wear gloves and goggles. Avoid touching mold or moldy items with your bare hands; household rubber gloves may be used. Wear clothes that cover as much of your body as possible, this includes your hair and shoes.



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What should I look for when hiring a contractor to remove mold?

Make sure to hire a **licensed contractor** or other professional with **experience** and **specific training in mold remediation** or “**mold abatement**.” Although there is no license or certification by the State of California specifically for fixing moisture or mold problems, you can find professionals who are certified for mold abatement by national professional organizations and trade groups. When choosing a contractor, ask questions about their specific training and experience, (e.g. if they have a license or certification for mold remediation), make sure they have insurance, and ask for references. Also, ask the contractor to explain the exact work they will perform to solve your mold and moisture problem.



For detailed information on cleaning up mold, visit:
www.epa.gov/mold/mold-cleanup-your-home

Note: You may report problems in your rental unit to **(888) 700-9995** between Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. or file a report online at <https://tinyurl.com/ehcomplaint> or by scanning the QR code.

