



Residential Mould – Prevention and Cleaning

It is unhealthy to live or work in mouldy homes and buildings. Indoor mould growth can be prevented by practicing good maintenance, and cleaning up any mould growth quickly and effectively. There are thousands of types of moulds. Mould spores are always present in air, both indoors and outdoors at all times of the year. Moulds enter buildings through doors, windows, and circulate in your home via the ventilation, heat and cooling systems. They can also be brought indoors on clothing, shoes and the skin and hair of people and pets.

How and where do moulds grow indoors?

It is not hard for mould spores to find the things it needs to grow in a home: nutrients and moisture. Nutrients available indoors to mould include dust, pet dander, and some building materials and furnishings. Sources of moisture include shower and bath areas, humidifiers, cooking, water leaks and condensation, and in some cases flooding. It takes as little as 48 hours for mould to appear on damp materials.

Moulds usually grow in areas that are damp or humid, such as bathrooms. They can also grow in humidifiers, porous insulation, fan coil units, and in condensation or drip pans. If building materials get wet, these surfaces can also support mould growth. These surfaces include drywall, ceiling tiles, carpet, wallpaper, window casings and even building foundations.

How do I know if I have mould in my home?

Signs that mould may be growing in your home include a musty, mildew smell and visual mould growth that may look like a stain or smudge or have a hairy appearance and may be black, white or other colours.

How can moulds affect my health?

Moulds release spores, dead particles, and various chemicals into the air when they grow. Anyone can be affected by moulds, but some people are more susceptible than others (e.g., people with asthma, allergies to mould, the very young and people with weakened immune systems). Factors that increase the risk of adverse health effects include being exposed to lots of mould, being exposed to mould for a long time, being repeatedly exposed to high levels of mould for short periods, and exposure to species of mould that can produce toxins. Health effects associated with indoor mould include:

Irritant symptoms, which include eye, throat, and skin irritations.

- Allergic reactions, which include symptoms similar to hay fever, asthma, and dermatitis.
- Toxic reactions, which include headaches and flu-like symptoms like fever and cough, diarrhea and fatigue.
- Infections, including lung infections, which are normally only a risk for people with severely weakened immune systems, such as those on chemotherapy, people living with HIV/AIDS, and for victims of severe burns whose skin has been damaged.

If you are concerned that you may be experiencing symptoms linked to mould exposure, please speak to your physician.

How can I prevent growth of indoor moulds?

The following actions will help prevent indoor mould growth:

- Clean bathrooms regularly and keep them dry by using fans when showering or bathing.
- Use a kitchen fan when cooking.
- Fix water leaks and condensation problems as soon as possible.
- Pay attention to windows that have condensation problems in the winter and mop up excessive moisture around windows. If possible, lower the humidity in the home.
- Dry any water damaged building materials or furnishings within 48 hours. If something cannot be dried it should be discarded.
- Get professional help for serious contamination problems, such as after a flood. Ottawa.ca has more information on what to do if your sewer backs up or your basement floods.
- If you are a tenant, all the precautions above apply. If there is a problem you cannot resolve on your own, advise your landlord as soon as possible, and if it is not resolved in a reasonable time, contact the City of Ottawa by calling 3-1-1 and report the problem.

How should I clean up mould?

Health Canada suggests seeking professional cleaning assistance if you have:

- an area of mould greater than a square meter, or
- more than three patches of mould each less than a square metre in area.
- Wear protective gear including rubber gloves, eye protection and a mask. Use a disposable respirator, such as an N95 mask, that seals well to your face to protect against mould and dust while cleaning and follow the manufacturer's instructions for proper use.
- Use soap and water to clean mould on hard surfaces: Clean with soap and water and rinse with clean water. Bleach is not necessary to clean up mould that is not related to a flooding event. For information on flood cleanup, please see <http://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/Flooding.aspx#Cleaning-up-your-home>
- Discard absorbent or porous materials that cannot be washed and dried. Materials such as ceiling tiles, upholstery and carpet may need to be thrown away if they become mouldy, as they can be very difficult to clean.

Where can I get more information?

- OttawaPublicHealth.ca: <http://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/home-safety.aspx>
- Health Canada: Addressing Moisture and Mould in Your Home: <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/services/first-nations-inuit-health/health-promotion/environmental-public-health/environmental-health/your-health-at-home/mould.html>
- Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation: <https://cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/maintaining-and-managing/managing-first-nation-properties/maintenance-solutions/mould-in-housing>
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/8tipstocleanupmold.htm>