



Mold and Mildew

What are mold and mildew? Mold and mildew are fungi that grow on the surfaces of objects and are found everywhere, both indoors and outdoors. They break down dead organic matter, like leaves or dead trees, and play an important role in nature. Different types of molds are different colors.

What makes mold and mildew grow? In order for mold and mildew to grow, there must be: an air temperature above 40 degrees and less than 100 degrees, mold spores (the tiny cell that can grow into mold), nutrients and moisture. Most building materials, furnishings and dirt contain nutrients that help spores grow. Moisture is a key to mold and mildew growth.

What about mold at home or in buildings? Mold can come into a home or building through open doors, windows, vents and heating and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. Spores outside can also attach to clothes, bags and pets and can be carried indoors.

Mold and mildew will grow in places with a lot of moisture. For example, around leaks in the roof, windows, pipes or where there has been flooding. Mold will grow on paper products, cardboard, ceiling tiles and wood products. Mold can also grow in dust, paints, wallpaper, insulation, drywall, carpet, fabric and upholstery – just about everywhere.

Can mold and mildew make someone sick? Molds have the potential to cause health problems. People exposed to damp or moldy environments may have a variety of health effects or none at all. People who are sensitive to molds may experience nasal stuffiness, throat irritation, coughing or wheezing, eye irritation, or in some cases, skin irritation. People with mold allergies may have more severe reactions. Immune-compromised people and people with chronic lung illnesses, such as obstructive lung disease, may get serious infections in their lungs when they are exposed to mold. These people should stay away from areas that are likely to have mold, such as compost piles, freshly cut grass and wooded areas.

Mold has been blamed for other severe health effects and research is on-going.

How do I prevent the growth and spread of mold at home? The key is to control moisture! Mold spores do not grow without moisture.

- Keep the humidity level in your home between 40 and 60 percent. Use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier during humid months and in damp spaces like basements.
- Make sure your home has enough ventilation. Use exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathroom to vent the air outside. Make sure your clothes dryer vents outside your home.
- Regularly check for and fix any leaks in the roof, walls or plumbing so mold does not have moisture to grow.
- If you have had a flood, clean up and dry out your home thoroughly and quickly, within 24 to 48 hours.
- Consider adding mold inhibitors to paints before painting.

What if I find mold or mildew?

- Make sure you look for and find the source of moisture. You must control this in order to stop the growth of mold. You may need the help of a professional, such as a plumber to find the source and stop the leak.

- If the area is ten square feet or less (about a three foot by three foot area), most people can clean it up themselves. Hard surfaces should be cleaned with detergent and water and dried completely. If you choose to use disinfectants or bleach, always make sure there is plenty of fresh air coming into the area and turn on your exhaust fan if there is one in the room. Never mix chlorine bleach solution with other cleaning solutions or detergents that contain ammonia because toxic fumes could be produced.
- Remove or replace carpets and upholstery that have been soaked and cannot be dried quickly and thoroughly. You may want to use other types of flooring materials (not carpet) in areas or rooms that typically have a lot of moisture, like bathrooms or basements.
- Materials that absorb moisture, such as ceiling tiles and carpet, may have to be thrown away if they become moldy. Mold can grow on or fill in the empty spaces and crevices of porous materials, so getting rid of it completely may be difficult or impossible.

What if the area to be cleaned is very large?

You may want or need to consult a contractor or professional company for assistance. You should always check references and ask the company to follow published guidelines for clean up. An example is the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH) guideline.

Where to get more information?

There is a great deal of information available about mold, indoor air quality, remediation and related topics. Some good sources include: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), a part of the CDC and the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA).

You may also contact the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division at 336-641-3771 or visit www.myguilford.com

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov
US Environmental Protection Agency, www.epa.gov