

# Mold and its Impact on your Health and Property

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



### What is mold?

Mold (also called “mildew”) is a fungus, and it’s important in the environment because it breaks down organic matter, such as leaves. There are more than 100,000 different species of mold, and mold is found everywhere in our environment, both indoors and outdoors. When mold spores come into contact with wet areas, mold can start to grow.

You can find mold in places with water damage, high humidity, and dampness. In most cases, mold will not grow if wet areas are dried within 24 to 48 hours of becoming wet.

### What are “toxic molds” and “black molds”?

“Toxic molds” are certain mold species that produce mycotoxins, which can cause a variety of health effects in humans and livestock. Not all mold species produce mycotoxins.

“Black toxic mold” can refer to a type of mold called *Stachybotrys chartarum*, also known as *Stachybotrys atra*. This mold usually grows on very wet materials due to long-term water problems such as high humidity, water leaks, or flooding. It is typically a greenish-black color. Constant moisture is needed for this type of mold to grow.

Black is a color, not a type of mold. Therefore, not all black-colored molds are toxic.

### Can mold make me sick?

Some mold species can produce allergens (substances that can cause an allergic reaction), irritants, or mycotoxins—toxic compounds that can make people sick. Touching or inhaling mold spores may cause an allergic response or worsen breathing problems such as asthma. Children, pregnant women, elderly individuals, and people with weakened immune systems may be more sensitive to mold. Speak with your doctor if you have concerns about your health.

### How do I clean mold?

In most cases, if the area of mold growth is small (less than 10 square feet, or roughly 3 feet by 3 feet), you can clean it yourself by scrubbing with detergent and water and then drying the area promptly.

Wear gloves, a NIOSH-approved N95 mask, eye protection, long sleeves, and pants when cleaning mold. This is important because spores can be released into the air and inhaled, causing respiratory issues. You may want to hire a mold cleaning professional if the area is large or if you have health conditions that could be worsened by mold.

### Steps for mold cleanup:

1. Find and fix the moisture problem.
2. Shut off heat or air conditioning to prevent mold spores from spreading. If possible, turn on a fan in a window to exhaust the air outdoors.
3. Remove materials with heavy mold growth, including porous materials that cannot be cleaned (e.g., ceiling tiles, leather, sheetrock, plaster, paneling, wood products, paper, carpet, padding).
4. Scrub the moldy area with hot water and detergent.
5. Dry the area completely over two or three days. Using dehumidifiers and fans will help.

### How do I prevent mold from growing indoors?

Moisture control is the first step in preventing mold growth. Fix all leaks and water problems, and dry wet items completely as soon as possible. Cleaning visible mold is important, but it will continue to return if the water issue is not fixed. Painting over mold will not prevent it from coming back.

### To prevent mold growth, homeowners should:

- Ventilate bathrooms, laundry areas, and kitchens
- Keep indoor humidity levels between 30% and 50% (running air conditioning or using a dehumidifier can help)
- Fix all leaky roofs, windows, and pipes
- Thoroughly clean and dry all wet areas after leaks or flooding

## What can I do if I am renting a home and find mold?

If you are renting a home and come across mold, tell your landlord or property manager immediately!

Try to identify where the moisture or leak is coming from. Common places include; the attic or roof, under the sink in your kitchen or bathroom, near plumbing pipes, and around doors and windows. Ask the property owner to fix the moisture issue. They may need to hire a plumber, roofer, and/or air conditioning technician.

If the mold is in a small area, you can safely clean it up yourself. If the mold is in a large area (10 square feet or more), ask the property owner to make arrangements to have it properly cleaned up.

If the property owner is unable to remove the mold, ask if they have another housing unit available for rent that you can move into or if they are willing to end your lease without penalty so you can move to another home. It's always best to work with the property owner, if possible.

## Is mold damage covered by my homeowner's insurance policy?

Homeowners should review their current policy or talk to their insurance agent about mold damage and coverage.

## What should I know about mold when buying a home?

When buying a home or property, ask about any current or previous defects in the property. A seller of residential property in Louisiana must provide a Property Disclosure Statement, which should include information on previous or current mold problems.

## How do I hire professional help?

You will need professional help if your HVAC system has mold growing inside of it, or if the water/mold damage was caused by sewage or other contaminated water. When hiring an expert or company to provide cleanup services you should consider the following:

- Company experience, including training and skills of the workers
- Company reputation (check with the Better Business Bureau)
- Company knowledge of local codes and regional climate conditions
- Cost
- Certifications and license requirements

Make sure companies or individuals have a valid contractor's license. Individuals who provide mold cleanup services in Louisiana must have a Mold Remediation Contractor's License from the Louisiana State Licensing Board for Contractors (LSLBC).

To find a licensed mold remediation contractor near you, contact LSLBC at 800-256-1392 or 225-219-3488 or visit their website: [www.lslbc.louisiana.gov/contractor-search/](http://www.lslbc.louisiana.gov/contractor-search/)

## Additional Resources

For additional resources, contact the Louisiana Department of Health's Indoor Environmental Quality Education Service (IEQS) at 1-888-293-7020.

