



FEMA

## Mold: A Health Hazard

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. -- One of the worst effects of water damage comes in the form of mold. Following a hurricane or severe floods, mold may develop, causing serious health problems. The state and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are working to inform the public as to the health hazards associated with mold, what can be done to minimize mold, and what ways can be effective in cleaning up mold.

If your home has water damage, mold could develop in as short of a time as 24 - 48 hours of water exposure. Even worse, it may continue to grow until steps are taken to thoroughly dry out the premises and eliminate the source of moisture. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that you may recognize mold by the sight-wall and ceiling discoloration, and smell-a musty, earthy odor.

Although mold is a naturally existing substance, it can be harmful to humans. When airborne mold spores are present in large quantities, they can cause **allergic reactions, asthma episodes, infections, and other respiratory problems**. Continued exposure to mold may result in nasal or sinus congestion, eye, nose, or throat irritations, and adverse effects to the nervous system.

Individuals who are at the greatest risk are infants and children, the elderly, those with immune-compromised related diseases, pregnant women, and those with existing respiratory conditions. Anyone falling into these categories should consult a physician if they are experiencing health problems. Follow these five steps to dry your home and combat health problems associated with mold:

- Open up the house-if the humidity outside is lower than indoors, and if the weather permits, open all the doors and windows to exchange the moist indoor air for drier outdoor air. If you have a thermometer with a humidity gauge, you can monitor the indoor and outdoor humidity. On the other hand, when temperatures drop at night, an open home is warmer and will draw moisture indoors. At night and other times when the humidity is higher outdoors, close up the house.
- Open closet and cabinet doors-remove drawers to allow air circulation. Drawers may stick because of swelling. Don't try to force them. Speed up the drying process by opening the back of the cabinet to let the air circulate. You will probably be able to remove the drawers as the cabinet dries out.
- Use fans-fans help move the air and dry out the home. They will blow out dirty air that might contain contaminants from sediment in the duct work; clean or hose out any ducts. Do not use central air conditioning or the furnace blower if the ducts were under water.
- Run dehumidifiers-dehumidifiers and window air conditioners will reduce the moisture, especially in closed up areas.

- Use desiccants-desiccants (materials that absorb moisture) such as silica gel are very useful in drying closets or other enclosed areas where air cannot move through. These types of materials may be purchased at hardware stores or home and garden stores.

If mold becomes an issue in your household, here are some of the ways to clean it out:

- Most household cleaners will be good enough to cleanse walls and wood furniture.
- Be aware that wallpaper paste can harbor mold, and therefore wall coverings may have to be removed and replaced.
- After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with a disinfectant to kill the germs and odors left by the floodwaters.
- Be careful of fumes; wear rubber gloves and a dust mask. Read any safety instructions in order to properly handle cleaning materials.

Drying your home could take several weeks. While it may seem that your house is safe from mold, your health may still be at risk because of the lingering effects of mold. When water damage infiltrates a structure, the long lasting effects can be detrimental to the composition of the building. If you believe that your health has been affected by exposure to mold, you should contact your physician and have your house checked.

If you have further questions concerning mold and your health, you may call the FEMA helpline at **800-621-FEMA (3362) or 800-462-7585 for the speech or hearing impaired**. You can also call the American Red Cross at 866-GET-INFO or the CDC at 800-CDC-INFO.