

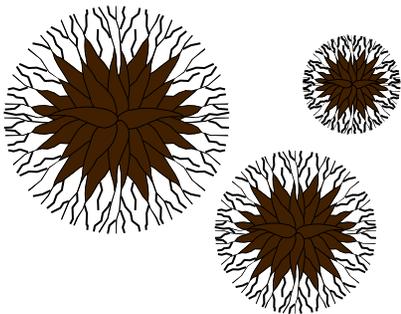
Many people consider mold an inconvenience in a wet basement or poorly ventilated bathroom. But molds can be much more than just an inconvenience—they can affect your health and the structural integrity of your house. Here are some frequently asked questions and their answers.

### What is mold?

Molds are microscopic fungi, which are neither plants nor animals. In nature, molds use enzymes to eat dead plants and animals. If there is a moist environment and other proper conditions, molds can attack materials in a house or building such as fiberboard, drywall, carpet backing, paper, dust, wood, or exposed soils in crawlspaces. Once established in a building, molds/fungi can spread, destroying structural wood components, and can be hard to get rid of.

### Why is mold hazardous?

Molds use tiny spores to reproduce. Spores that become airborne can be hard to filter out and may stay suspended in the air for long periods of time.



The spores can be easily inhaled, which can cause the following symptoms:

- **coughing, wheezing,**
- **runny nose/sinus problems,**
- **skin rashes if touched, and**
- **other immune responses after long-term exposure**

A few mold species are capable of producing toxins if conditions are right. People vary in their sensitivity to the concentration of spores in the air. The elderly, children, and people with compromised immune systems are most vulnerable to the effects of inhaled spores, but even healthy people may react to high concentrations.

### No one should live with mold

#### How do I prevent mold?

As part of routine maintenance, buildings should be checked for evidence of water damage and visible mold. Conditions that can cause mold (water leaks, flooding, high humidity, and condensation) should be corrected.

#### Is there mold in my house?

For mold to grow, it needs moisture and a food source. Since there is usually plenty of organic material in a home to serve as food for the mold, the presence of water determines where mold will grow. If you can see visible mold growth or smell musty odors, then you may have mold growing in your home.

### Should I test for mold?

Testing is expensive and sometimes unreliable because molds are naturally present in the outdoor environment. If you can see it or smell it, you've probably got mold in your house. Unless it is for legal or insurance purposes, testing/sampling for mold isn't recommended.

### How do I clean-up?

For any mold problem, the moisture source needs to be eliminated first. Air circulation and increased light may also reduce mold growth. If the contaminated area is **approximately less than 10 square feet:**

- A homeowner can undertake cleanup, but should wear personal protective gear such as gloves and an N-95 respirator. Only individuals who are free from allergy, asthma, and immune disorders should clean the area.
- No containment is necessary

If an area of mold is **approximately between 10 and 30 square feet:**

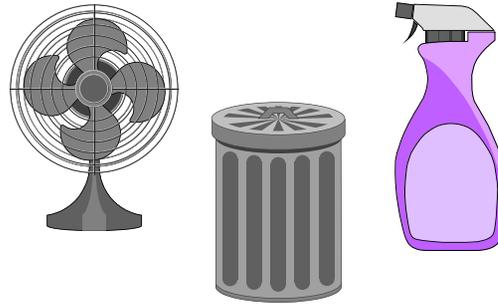
- A homeowner can undertake cleanup, but should wear at least a half-face respirator with HEPA filter, as well as gloves and full coverage of skin.
- Limited containment should be utilized, including enclosing the area with plastic sheeting, sealing vents in and out of the area, and maintaining negative pressure.

If the contaminated area is **more than 30 square feet** or involves vulnerable populations:

- Consider using personnel experienced in mold clean-up and disinfection or in handling of hazardous materials (such as asbestos) to undertake cleanup.
- Limited to full containment should be utilized; as well as limited to full Personal Protective Equipment.

In general, contaminated porous materials must be discarded and replaced, while contaminated non-porous materials can be cleaned and salvaged. The extent of contamination and the value of items may determine ultimately what is saved and what is not. Using a HEPA vacuum after thoroughly drying material can often help to salvage materials. Mold spores/fragments may remain in porous materials but will not grow if it is completely dried. The drawback to this is that mold that is not actively growing can still be inhaled and pose a health risk.

Typically, if contaminated material can be cleaned, a detergent solution is adequate. However, if bleach is desired, make sure to use a dilute 10% solution (1.5 cups/1 gallon water) and ventilate the area. Let the area sit for 15 minutes, then rinse with water and allow thorough drying.



### Who do I contact for more information?

For questions regarding mold and indoor air quality, contact:

**Nebraska Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Division of Public Health  
Indoor Air Quality Program  
P.O. Box 95026  
Lincoln, NE 68509  
(402) 471-1005**

**Email: [dhhs.hhia@nebraska.gov](mailto:dhhs.hhia@nebraska.gov)  
Website: [www.dhhs.ne.gov/enh/indoor.htm](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/enh/indoor.htm)**

**Or  
Your Local Health Department**

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services is committed to affirmative action/equal employment opportunities and does not discriminate in delivering benefits or services.

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# Is Mold Affecting Your Health?

## Mold and Indoor Air Quality



Nebraska Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Division of Public Health  
Indoor Air Quality Program

Department of Health & Human Services  
**DHHS**  
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