



**STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

How to Clean Mold from Your House

1. Introduction to Molds

Molds can be found everywhere in our environment, both indoors and outdoors. The general rule of thumb is "any indoor mold is unwanted mold." Mold grows in indoor environments by landing on damp spots and growing and digesting whatever food source is available. Molds can grow on virtually any organic source such as wood, paper, carpet and foods mainly in areas where there is high moisture or water activity. The key to mold control is moisture control.

2. Basic Mold Cleanup

It is important to dry water damaged areas and items as quickly as possible. Many molds can start growing within 24-48 hours after a water incursion episode. If mold has become a problem, get rid of the excess water and moisture and fix any structural or plumbing leaks or any other sources of water. Mold can be washed off of hard surfaces with detergent and water. Absorbent materials (i.e. drywall, ceiling tiles, and carpets) that have become moldy may need to be replaced.

3. Things to Know About Mold

- Potential health effects and symptoms associated with mold exposure include allergic reactions, asthma and other respiratory complaints.
- There is no practical way to eliminate all mold and mold spores in the indoor environment; the way to control mold growth is to control moisture.
- If mold is a problem in your home, you must eliminate moisture sources and clean up the mold. Fix the source of the water problem or leak as soon as possible.
- After removing excess or standing water, mold can be washed off of hard surfaces with detergent and water. Absorbent materials or materials contaminated by dirty water (i.e. flood waters or raw sewage) that have become contaminated may need to be replaced.

- Reduce indoor humidity (below 60% RH) to inhibit microbial growth. Vent bathrooms, dryers and other moisture-generating sources to the exterior. Increasing air circulation with ceiling or wall fans may also aid in drying interior spaces. Air conditioners and dehumidifiers may also be used to control high humidity levels.
- Prevent condensation: Reduce the potential for condensation on cold surfaces by adding insulation.
- In areas where flooding occurs or where there is a perpetual moisture problem, do not install carpeting.

4. Floods and Flooding

Mold growth may become a problem after flooding. Standing water and excess moisture may provide ideal breeding conditions for microorganisms. For these reasons, and to lessen the possibility of structural damage, all standing water should be removed as quickly as possible and the areas dried out with fans or dehumidifiers. The U.S. EPA has a fact sheet entitled "Flood Cleanup: Avoiding Indoor Air Quality Problems" which discusses steps that should be taken when cleaning and repairing a home after flooding. The fact sheet can be viewed at the website listed below or a hard copy can be obtained through the State Department of Health.

Remove Wet Materials

It can be difficult to throw away items in a home, particularly those with sentimental value. However, keeping certain items that were damaged by water may be unhealthy. Some materials tend to absorb and keep water more than others. In general, porous and absorbent materials that are wet and cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried within 24-48 hours should be discarded, as they can become a source of microbial growth.

5. Mold and Air Conditioning Systems

Mechanical ventilation systems can provide a breeding ground for mold if they are not maintained or working properly. Air conditioning units and associated components (cooling coils, drain pans, filters, ductwork, etc.) should be inspected on a routine basis to see if any repairs or cleaning is necessary. Many areas may be inaccessible, so ask your service provider to check for any possible mold contamination or problems. In general, you should consider having the unit and ducts cleaned if there is substantial visible mold growth inside hard surface ducts or on other components. In addition, fiberboard, fibrous insulation, and disposable filters cannot be effectively cleaned and should be removed and replaced if they have contacted water.

For information on mold prevention and cleanup, visit www.epa.gov/iaq/molds or call the Dept. of Health's Indoor & Radiological Health Branch at (808) 586-5800.