



Mold and mildew are general terms used to describe kinds of fungus. There are hundreds of different types of molds that vary in color and appearance. Mold is common in nature, and can also be found indoors. Mold can grow on foods, building materials, upholstery, clothes and other surfaces.

If your home or building has been flooded and you were not able to dry it out within 24 to 48 hours, assume you have mold growth.

Mold and Your Health

How you may react to mold depends on several factors including the type of mold, the amount of mold, the amount of time you are exposed, and your overall health.

Exposure to mold can lead to asthma attacks, eye and skin irritation and allergic reactions. You may have more severe reactions if you have mold allergies. If you have a weakened immune system or breathing problems, you may get a serious lung infection when you are around mold. Although rare, it is possible to get a respiratory fungal infection, which means the fungus grows on or in your body tissue.

Talk to your health care provider if you have health concerns or questions.

Testing for Mold

Testing for mold is not necessary or recommended. Understanding the results can be difficult because there are no standards to compare the results to. Test results cannot be used to say a building is “safe” or “unsafe.” No matter how much or what kind of mold is in your home or building, the action steps to fix the problem are the same: dry it out and clean it up.

Protect Yourself from Mold

Protect yourself from mold by wearing protective clothing, including masks (N-95), gloves and goggles. Children, people with breathing problems and people with weakened immune systems should not help clean up after a flood.

Use portable air cleaners with HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filters to reduce your exposure to mold in the air. Learn how to select the right air cleaner for your home or building in the [EPA’s Guide to Air Cleaners in the Home](http://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/air-cleaners-and-air-filters-home) (www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/air-cleaners-and-air-filters-home).

Have your heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system checked before you turn it on to prevent spreading mold throughout your home or building.

Fixing a Mold Problem

To fix a mold problem, you must completely dry out your home or building first. Mold will come back if your home or building is not completely dry. Open doors and windows. Use fans and dehumidifiers when electricity is safe.

Once dry and clean, remove mold by following these steps:

- Clean moldy items that do not absorb water (glass, plastic, marble, granite, ceramic tile, metal) by using soap and water. Surfaces in contact with floodwater should be disinfected after they are cleaned.
- Throw away and replace materials that easily absorb water (cushions, mattresses, drywall, carpet, insulation, and ceiling tiles).
- Wash clothes and other fabrics. Wash all clothes worn during the cleanup in hot water and detergent, and keep them separate from uncontaminated items.
- Vacuum with a HEPA filter vacuum.

Hiring a Contractor

Flooding can cause significant mold growth. If mold is covering more than 100 square feet, you will probably want to get help from a contractor that specializes in mold cleanup. As with any contractor, get references to assess the contractor's experience, past work success, and if other clients liked their work. Please note there are no federal or Vermont certifications or licenses for mold remediation.

A contractor is not needed for a small mold problem of less than 10 square feet. For areas between 10 and 100 square feet, use your judgment to decide.

No “Black Mold” Species

No species of mold is named “black mold.” Many kinds of mold may be black, and the color of mold does not describe what type it is or how hazardous it is. *Stachybotrys chartarum* (*S. chartarum*) is a mold species that often is incorrectly called “black mold.” It has also been featured in news reports as more toxic than other molds. Currently, it is not known whether exposure to *S. chartarum* causes more illness than exposure to other mold species.

Renter and Employees

If you are a renter or employee, talk with your landlord or employer about mold problems. If the problem is serious and conditions persist, renters may want to call their Town Health Officer (www.HealthVermont.gov/find-your-THO), and employees may wish to contact the Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration (VOSHA).

More Information at www.HealthVermont.gov/Flood

Frequently Asked Questions

Should I test for mold if my home or building was flooded?

No, testing for mold is not necessary or recommended. If your home or building has been flooded and you were not able to dry it out within 24 to 48 hours, assume you have mold growth.

Why should I use soap and water?

Soap and water are safe and effective. Using a disinfectant to kill mold is not usually recommended. Dead mold can still cause health effects in some people. Mold ultimately needs to be removed. First, wipe surfaces with soap and water to remove mold. Then, vacuum surfaces with a HEPA filter vacuum.

When should I disinfect surfaces in my home or building?

Using a disinfectant to kill mold is not usually recommended. However, you need to disinfect surfaces that have come in contact with floodwater. You may also need to disinfect porous foundation materials or foundation materials with cracks and crevices (for example, stone, block wall or concrete) to kill mold you cannot remove by cleaning alone. First, clean surfaces with soap and water. Then disinfect them by following the steps in the next question.

If I need to disinfect surfaces, what type of disinfectant should I use?

When possible, choose a disinfectant that uses a safer active ingredient, like hydrogen peroxide, citric acid, ethanol or lactic acid, rather than using bleach. Make sure to follow all the instructions on the product label and wear protective clothing, including N-95 masks, gloves and goggles. [Find out more about safer disinfectants.](#)

How can I prevent future mold growth if my foundation is often wet?

Preventing water and moisture problems in your home or building is the key to preventing future mold growth. In humid basements, running a dehumidifier set between 30 and 50% relative humidity can help. Basements that are very damp or wet may need a water or drainage system installed. Talk to a professional to discuss the best system for your home or building.