

Facts about Mold



Molds are simple fungi, usually microscopic in size, that occur naturally in large quantities. Molds are part of the natural environment. Outdoors, molds play a part in nature by breaking down dead organic matter such as fallen leaves and dead trees, but indoors, mold growth should be avoided. Molds have the potential to cause health problems. Molds produce allergens (substances that can cause allergic reactions) and in some cases, potentially toxic substances (mycotoxins). Inhaling or touching mold or mold spores may cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals.

Mold spores are airborne and are everywhere, and because of their small size, there is very little that people can do about that. What people can do, however, is to make sure that the environment in their home is not a place where these spores can grow. Mold spores need a warm, humid environment to grow into mold, so to prevent their growth, you must prevent this ideal environment in your home.

Indoor humidity is probably the biggest factor in indoor mold growth, and it is also the factor that you as the homeowner have the most control over. Some signs that you have excess moisture in your home can include musty odors, frost and ice on cold surfaces, fogging windows, discoloration of building materials, rot and decay, sweating pipes, water leaks and dripping, peeling, and blistering and cracking paint. You can also get an inexpensive gauge to measure relative humidity at any hardware store. Indoor humidity should be between 30-50% during the winter.

If you find that you have excessive humidity in your home, some simple things you can do to reduce the humidity in your home include: turn down or discontinue using a humidifier; use range and bathroom exhaust fans while cooking or bathing; cook with covered pans; install a fresh air intake duct to bring in outside air with a low relative humidity; vent dryers to the outside; seal cracks in the house and in the vapor barrier; and consider installing a properly designed mechanical ventilation system.

Controlling mold once it is already a problem usually involves three steps:

1. Eliminating moisture from both inside and outside sources: this is often more complex and difficult than it seems because your moisture problem may have several causes. This step may involve inspection and repair of your roof, gutters and downspouts, installing drain tile, sloping the ground away from your foundation, waterproofing your basement and eliminating "behavioral" sources of moisture as described above.
2. Removing the mold colonies and as many spores as possible: Depending on the size of the contamination, this may be something that you can handle or something that you may have to hire a professional to take care of. This process will involve removing all porous building materials, your belongings, and anything else that will soak up water from the area, drying the area and thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces.
3. Installing an adequate mechanical ventilation system: Adequate ventilation and circulation can solve many humidity problems. This could be as simple as installing bath and kitchen exhaust fans or as complex as installing a new HVAC system in your home. A trained HVAC professional can assist you in assessing your home's needs.