

How to get hold of your household mold

By Aaron Warnick

When mold starts to grow on your food, you know it's time to throw it out. However, you can't do that with your home. Mold growth is really common in residences and other buildings, so you'd be moving a lot. But there are things you can do to stop mold growth from moving in with you.

Mold is fungus. Out in nature, mold helps break down dead things like tree branches and leaves. It spreads by sending little spores in the air, and when they hit something damp like dead bark, they start to grow and feed off the surface. Mold is in the air all around us.

"Mold is part of nature," says Dean Mitchell,

MD, an allergist and immunologist in New York City. "But when mold starts growing in your home, you need to take care of it."

Mold spores make their way indoors a number of ways. Windows, vents, doors and heating and air conditioning systems all provide entryways for mold into your home. Your shoes, clothes and even your pets can bring outdoor mold inside. And if it lands on something damp, it can settle in and begin to eat whatever it's on.

Once it's found a place to live, mold will grow and send more spores into the air. Having a little spore factory where you live can be harmful to health. For most molds, the risks to health aren't severe. If you're allergic to mold — which an allergist can test you for — you might have a reaction ranging from hay fever-like symptoms to rashes. But even if you're not allergic to it, mold can still irritate your eyes and skin.

Molds come in a lot of different colors and textures and grow in different places. Some molds are more dangerous than others. Slimy dark green or black mold can cause breathing problems over time. Mold can cause respiratory problems for people with asthma, and asthma-like symptoms for people who don't have the disease.

Your body's immune system has to fight the mold to keep you healthy, but that fight can make you sick and fatigued, says Mitchell.

In short, don't ignore mold in your house. "You have to be like a detective," Mitchell says. "If you find mold or you start having allergic reactions in your home, you need to find where the mold is growing and how it got there."

Sometimes you may see a little mildew on your bathroom tiles or growing next to your window. If it's a small area, less than 10 square feet, tackle it yourself by scrubbing it away with water and detergent. But if it's on something absorbent such as carpeting or ceiling tiles, the best thing to do is rip them out.

Cleaning mold spots releases spores into



>> For more tips on preventing and cleaning mold, visit www.cdc.gov/mold

the air. So be sure to wear a respirator, gloves and goggles while tackling it.

But getting rid of mold is only part of the battle. You need to figure out why mold was growing in your home in the first place. The most likely culprits are water and humidity, which are incubators for mold. "I am so fearful of water in my home," Mitchell says. "Anything from a loose toilet to a small leak in the roof can cause water damage that makes mold more likely to grow."

If water is getting where it shouldn't, that needs to be fixed. Otherwise, no amount of cleaning will solve your mold problem. Check near pipes and other water sources to make sure they're not leaking.

Sometimes, simply finding the mold is a challenge. If you think you might have a mold problem but can't find it, you can call in professionals to help. They can help rid your house of mold in areas not easy to find or reach.

Stopping mold before it starts

The best way to get a handle on mold is to prevent it in the first place. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers these tips:

- ◆ **Control the humidity.** Keep your home's humidity levels no higher than 50%. Measure your home's humidity with a meter, and if it is high, use a dehumidifier to keep it in check. Monitor humidity levels at different times.
- ◆ **Let it flow.** The air in your home should flow freely. Make sure your clothes dryer vents outside your home and use exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathroom.
- ◆ **Watch for water.** Be on the lookout for leaks in your home's roof, walls, faucets and pipes.
- ◆ **Dry it up.** If your home is involved in a flood, clean it up and dry it out within 24 to 48 hours.
- ◆ **Prep that paint.** Before you paint, add in mold inhibitors, or look for primer that already has it.



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