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**Illinois Department of Public Health**

**Environmental Health**

**FACT SHEET**

## **Common Questions and Answers About Indoor Mold**

Concern about the health effects of exposure to indoor mold has been growing over the past few years. In this fact sheet, we provide answers to the most common questions received about indoor mold and health.

Other IDPH fact sheets that relate to mold include:

- Moisture in the Home
- Mold, Reducing Your Exposure to
- Mold and Your Health
- Indoor Environmental Quality: Testing Should Not be the First Step
- Cleaning Up After Flood and Sewer Overflows

### **Does IDPH test for mold?**

No, IDPH does not test for mold. Even if testing is done, no standards or guidelines exist to judge acceptable levels of mold. Generally, IDPH does not recommend mold testing (see below).

### **Who can test for mold?**

Citizens can find individuals or companies that perform mold testing by looking under “Environmental Services” in the Yellow Pages of their telephone book. IDPH recommends looking for individuals or companies that employ certified industrial hygienists or persons who work under the supervision of industrial hygienists.

Citizens also may search the Internet for individuals or companies that do this kind of work. The American Industrial Hygiene Association provides a list of its members at <http://www.aiha.org>. Citizens may search the list of certified industrial hygienists by specialty, state and location (i.e., residential, commercial or both).

### **Should I have my home or business tested for mold?**

IDPH does not recommend testing for mold (see the fact sheet “Indoor Environmental Quality: Testing Should Not Be the First Step”). If mold growth is visible, testing is not

needed to identify what type or level of mold is present. Mold testing also is not typically useful in determining what steps to take for cleanup.

If you can see or smell mold, testing is usually not necessary. It is likely that there is a source of moisture that needs to be fixed and the mold needs to be cleaned or removed. Even if testing is done, no standards or guidelines exist to judge acceptable amounts of mold. *Testing cannot determine whether health effects will occur.*

### **What is Stachybotrys?**

Stachybotrys is a greenish-black, slimy mold found only on cellulose products (such as wood or paper) that have remained wet for several days or more. Stachybotrys does not grow on concrete, linoleum or tile. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, all molds should be treated the same with respect to potential health risks and removal. Exposure to any mold could cause health effects under the right conditions.

### **What are the health effects of mold exposure?**

Many molds can cause adverse health effects. Molds produce allergens, irritants and, sometimes, toxins that may cause adverse reactions in humans. A reaction to mold depends on how much a person is exposed to, the general health and age of a person and the person's sensitivities or allergies. The same amount of mold may cause health effects in one person, but not in another.

Exposure to mold can cause a variety of symptoms. Sensitive people who have touched or inhaled mold or mold spores may have allergic reactions such as a runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, watery eyes, skin rash and itching. Molds can trigger asthma attacks in people who are allergic to molds, causing wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath. A disease like pneumonia also may develop after exposure to mold, but this is uncommon.

### **How can I clean areas of mold in my home or business?**

The guidelines for cleaning smaller areas (less than 30 square feet) of mold growth include the following practices:

1. Find and fix the source of excess moisture. Any mold cleanup or remediation plan that does not address underlying moisture problems will ultimately fail.
2. Heavily damaged, porous materials (such as carpeting or drywall) that cannot be thoroughly dried and cleaned should be discarded and replaced. Non-porous surfaces and porous materials that cannot be removed should be cleaned using a soap or detergent solution. Areas that have been cleaned also may be disinfected using a diluted bleach solution (no more than 1 cup of bleach per 1 gallon of water), but it is critical that all visible mold growth and soiling are cleaned off using a soap or detergent solution before applying a disinfectant. Bleach will be less effective if dirt and visible mold are not removed first.
3. Minimize dust and debris when removing moldy drywall, carpet, and other materials by misting surfaces with water. Do not dry scrape or sand surfaces contaminated with

mold, and do not use hammers when removing drywall.

4. Water-damaged materials and debris should be double-bagged, sealed, and the bag wiped clean prior to removal from work areas. This will help to prevent mold spores from spreading to other, uncontaminated areas.
5. Provide continuous ventilation, especially when cleaning agents or disinfectants are used.
6. Wear rubber gloves and protective clothing that are easily cleaned or discarded. In addition, wear a properly fitted N95 or HEPA respirator mask. These masks can be purchased for a minimal cost at a hardware store. To prevent eye irritation, wear goggles without ventilation holes.

The guidelines for cleaning areas of mold growth larger than 30 square feet (roughly the size of a sheet of dry wall) include these additional practices, which may require the services of a professional mold remediator:

1. Isolate work areas using methods similar to those used for lead or asbestos abatement. This should include critical barriers that block all openings, and heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system components to prevent the spread of hazardous materials into surrounding areas, and negatively pressurizing the work areas from surrounding areas. The HVAC system also should be shut down during removal activities.
2. Clean all surfaces within the work areas to remove settled dust or debris prior to taking apart critical barriers. Surfaces in surrounding areas also can be cleaned, if necessary, after taking apart the critical barriers. Use cleaning methods, products and devices that are known to be successful in the cleanup of mold contaminated dusts, such as HEPA vacuums and diluted bleach solutions.
3. Surfaces should be cleaned by HEPA vacuuming until surface dust is no longer visible. After vacuuming, surfaces should be wet cleaned with a soap or detergent solution. If a residue remains, it should be vacuumed. Cleaning can be followed by disinfection with a diluted bleach solution (no more than 1 cup of bleach per 1 gallon of water). It is critical that all visible mold growth and soiling are cleaned off using a soap or detergent solution before applying a disinfectant. Bleach will be less effective if dirt and visible mold are not removed first.
4. Allow complete drying of all materials wet from excess moisture, cleaning activities, or disinfection.
5. Provide continuous ventilation, especially when cleaning agents or disinfectants are used.

### **Are there professionals that perform mold cleanup?**

Yes. You can find professionals who perform mold cleanup by looking under "Fire and Water Damage Restoration" in the Yellow Pages of a telephone book. You also may search

for professionals on the Internet. The Institute for Inspection, Cleaning, and Restoration Certification (<http://www.certifiedcleaners.org/index.shtml>) and the Association of Specialists in Cleaning and Restoration (<http://www.ascr.org>) allow consumers to perform a search for their members online. The results of a typical search will include names of professionals, geographic location, and a telephone number.

### **Does IDPH license individuals to perform mold testing or cleanup?**

No. At this time, IDPH does not license individuals to perform mold testing or cleanup. IDPH cannot recommend the service of any particular contractor.

### **Does Illinois have laws that pertain to mold?**

In 2003, the Illinois General Assembly adopted House Joint Resolution 12, which established the Joint Task Force on Mold in Indoor Environments. This task force examined the mold issue in Illinois and made recommendations to the General Assembly about the regulation of mold in indoor environments in Illinois. In 2007, the Mold Remediation Registration Act was passed into law. This law requires that IDPH annually report to the General Assembly any federal research and regulations related to mold cleanup and standards for mold remediation training.

### **I have mold in my apartment and my landlord won't address the situation. Can you help?**

IDPH does not have the authority to enforce codes that define and protect indoor air quality. We can provide information and recommendations to you and your landlord for addressing the mold, but we cannot require your landlord to implement the recommendations that we provide. In fact, we often refer citizens back to an enforcement entity within their local government, such as a Department of Building and Zoning, for assistance since some mold problems may result from building code violations. Persons in incorporated areas should contact their city government while persons in unincorporated areas should contact their county government.

### **Will you inspect my home or apartment?**

IDPH does not perform inspections of residential environments for mold. We primarily respond to requests for assistance by providing information by telephone and providing recommendations for homeowners, landlords or tenants to take to alleviate conditions that may represent a potential health hazard.

### **What about schools?**

IDPH staff can assist schools with indoor environmental issues upon request. This assistance generally includes providing information and working with school officials.

### **Where can I find more information about indoor mold and health?**

More information about mold is available at:

<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html> or  
[http://www.cdc.gov/mold/dampness\\_facts.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mold/dampness_facts.htm)

More detailed fact sheets on this topic are available on the IDPH Web site at:  
<http://www.idph.state.il.us/a-zlist.htm>

You may also contact the IDPH office nearest you:

Illinois Department of Public Health  
Division of Environmental Health  
525 W. Jefferson St.  
Springfield, IL 62761  
217-782-5830  
TTY (hearing impaired use only)  
800-547-0466

Champaign Regional Office  
2125 S. First St.  
Champaign, IL 61820  
217-278-5900

Edwardsville Regional Office  
#22 Kettle River Drive  
Glen Carbon, IL 62034  
618-656-6680

Marion Regional Office  
2309 W. Main St.  
Marion, IL 62959  
618-993-7010

Peoria Regional Office  
5415 N. University St.  
Peoria, IL 61614  
309-693-5360

Rockford Regional Office  
4302 N. Main St.  
Rockford, IL 61103  
815-987-7511

West Chicago Regional Office  
245 W. Roosevelt Road  
West Chicago, IL 60185  
630-293-6800

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