



# Dealing with Mold Problems After a Flood

CENTRAL DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
*Adapted from the Minnesota Department of Health*

**Indoor mold can trigger allergies or allergy-like symptoms affecting the upper respiratory system. Although other, more serious problems may occur if people are exposed to very high levels of mold, the most common complaints are:**

- nasal and sinus congestion
- cough
- wheeze/breathing difficulties
- sore throat
- skin and eye irritation
- upper respiratory infections (including sinus infections)

The effect of mold on different people can vary widely. However, long-term exposure to high levels from indoor mold growth can eventually be unhealthy for anyone.

Certain groups may be at greater risk than others, including infants, children, the elderly, those with respiratory conditions or sensitivities such as severe indoor allergies or asthma, those with a weakened immune system.

## TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF

People who have health problems or are very sensitive to mold should not do clean-up work in situations where there is heavy mold growth, or a high risk of disturbing materials contaminated with mold. People who are in poor physical condition should be extremely cautious about doing heavy work while wearing a respirator.

The following precautions are recommended when working with moldy materials:

- Wear an “N-95” or a N100 type disposable respirator (available from safety equipment suppliers, hardware stores, or some building supply stores).
- Use rubber gloves
- Wear eye goggles that seal out fine dust-like materials
- Wear outer clothing (long-sleeved shirts and long pants) that can be easily removed before leaving the work area, and later laundered or discarded
- Do not eat, drink or smoke in the contaminated area, since disease-causing organisms from sewage or floodwater may be present.

## CLEAN-UP AND REMOVAL OF MOLD: THE BASIC STEPS

**1. Identify and remove any sources of moisture.** This is the most important – and the most basic – thing you need to do. Mold can’t grow without moisture. And don’t forget to look for sources of moisture that aren’t related to the flood.

**2. Begin drying any and all materials that got wet.** Do this as soon as possible. After the floodwaters have receded, water-soaked building materials and household items can be a significant ongoing source of moisture, promoting the growth of mold. They should be rapidly dried or removed from the building if possible. For severe

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moisture problems, use fans and dehumidifiers, and move wet items away from walls and off floors. Check with equipment rental companies or restoration firms to see if you can rent fans and dehumidifiers. **However, to avoid spreading mold spores, do not operate fans if visible mold is already present.**

**3. Remove and dispose of mold-contaminated materials.** Look for mold on porous items that may have absorbed moisture– including sheet rock, insulation, plaster, carpet/carpet pad, ceiling tiles, wood (other than solid wood), and paper products. If you see evidence of mold, these items should be removed, bagged and thrown out. Porous materials that may have been in contact with sewage should also be bagged and thrown away. Non-porous materials can be saved if they are properly cleaned and dried and then kept that way.

**4. Clean non-porous or semi-porous items.** Mold can grow on materials like hard plastic, concrete, glass, or metal – but it can usually be removed with careful cleaning. Solid wood items can also be salvaged through cleaning, if they are structurally sound. Bear in mind that mold spores and particles can cause health problems even if they're dead. For that reason, when you clean an item, the objective is to capture and remove the mold contamination. For heavily contaminated items, begin by using a HEPA vacuum (not a conventional household vacuum or shop vacuum) to remove as much contamination as possible.

**If you can't get a HEPA vacuum, carefully damp wipe the item, to remove as much surface contamination as possible.** Rinse wipes often with clean water. Dispose of your wipes and rinse water frequently and properly – they'll be contaminated with mold. After HEPA-vacuumping or damp wiping, thoroughly scrub all contaminated surfaces. Use a stiff brush, hot water, and a non-ammonia soap/detergent or commercial cleaner. Collect excess cleaner/cleaning water a wet/dry vacuum, mop or sponge. Rinse the surface or item – and the clean-up area -- with clean water. Collect the excess rinse water, and dry everything as quickly as possible.

**5. Disinfect surfaces (optional).** After removing all visible mold and other dirt or soiling from contaminated surfaces, a disinfectant may be used to kill some of the mold that may still be present. Disinfection is not a substitute for cleaning and removal of mold. However, it's essential for items that have been in contact with sewage. If you disinfect, follow these guidelines, and contact your local health department for additional advice:

- Mix 1/4 to 1/2 cup bleach per gallon of water and apply to surfaces where mold growth was visible before cleaning. Apply with a spray bottle, garden sprayer, sponge, or some other suitable method.
- Collect any run-off of the bleach solution with a wet/dry vacuum, sponge or mop. Do not rinse or wipe the bleach solution from the items or surfaces being treated – allow it to dry on the surface.

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### AVOID SPREADING MOLD CONTAMINATION

**As you plan and carry out your clean-up activities, take steps to avoid spreading mold spores:**

- Enclose moldy items in plastic (bags or sheets) before you carry them out
- When transporting moldy materials, use the shortest path into and out of the building
- Hang plastic sheeting to seal off the work area
- Remove the outer layer of work clothes before leaving the work area. Bag contaminated clothes or wash them separately.
- Damp clean all surfaces in and around the work area to remove any fine dust.

Central District Health Department (CDHD) provides this information as an educational resource. CDHD does not provide mold-related inspections or investigations.

#### Contact CDHD

If you have questions, please contact CDHD's Environmental Health Department  
Phone: (208) 327-7499 | Fax: (208) 327-8553  
707 N. Armstrong Pl., Boise, ID 83704

