



MOLD FACTS & PREVENTION TIPS

Events such as roof leaks, water pipe leaks, blocked A/C condensation drainpipes, broken hot water heaters, window condensation, and the most common on the coast, high relative humidity, can quickly lead to mold growth inside your residence. Avoiding or at least identifying these and other moisture/water events quickly can reduce the high cost of mold remediation and the negative effects on your indoor air quality.

Mold

When excessive moisture accumulates in buildings or on building materials, mold growth will occur, particularly if the moisture/water problem remains undiscovered or unaddressed. Mold growth can occur within 24 to 48 hours. While it is impossible to eliminate all molds and mold spores in the indoor environment, mold growth can be controlled indoors by controlling the indoor relative humidity and moisture.

Molds produce tiny spores (seeds) to reproduce, just as plants produce pollen. These airborne mold spores can be found in both indoor and outdoor air, and they settle on indoor and outdoor surfaces. Mold spores are invisible to the naked eye because they are microscopic in size, generally between 2-10 μm (μm = one millionth of a meter).

All molds have the potential to cause health effects. Molds produce allergens, irritants, and in some cases, toxins that may cause reactions in humans. The types and severity of symptoms depend, in part, on the types and concentrations of molds present, the extent of an individual's exposure, the ages of the individuals, and their existing sensitivities, allergies and health condition.

Mold Prevention Tips

There is no practical way to eliminate all molds and mold spores in the indoor environment. The most effective way to control indoor mold growth is to control the moisture and water build-up.

- **Good housekeeping is closely related to good indoor air quality.** Household dust, which consists mostly of dander (dead skins cells), is an excellent food source for mold growth and dust mites and is a breeding ground for insects and allergens.
- **If your A/C does not have a condensation drainpipe cut-off switch installed, please install one.** Slime builds up in the condensation drainpipe and blocks the drain, resulting in a water loss followed by mold growth in the A/C closet, as well as potentially impacting adjacent rooms.
- **Run your A/C thermostat on auto-fan only, not on manual.**



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- **Maintaining the relative humidity inside your residence below 60% is highly recommended.** In order to check the humidity levels, you will need a relative humidity meter (hygrometer) or at least a humidity ornament. Also, your A/C should be set to maintain relative humidity below 60% with the thermostat set around 76-78°F. Alternatively, you may use a portable dehumidifier to help control the relative humidity. Typically the dehumidifier drains into a bucket inside the machine, and the bucket must be emptied periodically. If you are away for an extended period of time, place the dehumidifier on a kitchen countertop where it can drain into a kitchen sink. Some dehumidifiers now come with a self-contained pump and hose to purge the collected water down a drain.
- **Use a quality MERV (Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value) rated filter of 7 to prevent dust and debris build-up on the A/C coils.** If you can see through your filter, it is low quality. Filters with a MERV rating of 7 are nearly as effective as true HEPA filters at trapping most airborne indoor particles.
- **Sunlight is arguably your most powerful natural weapon against most mold and mildew.** When mold growth resulting from high humidity occurs, you typically see the visible mold growth in dark or shaded areas in your residence, such as inside closets and cabinets or behind furniture placed against walls. Storm shutters and blinds on windows and doors are good for security but place your residence in a cave-like environment, which is ideal for certain types of mold to grow, especially when you are away for extended periods of time.
- **Maintaining good air circulation is essential to preventing mold inside the home.** Mold spores thrive in stagnant air, and a lack of air circulation can prevent moisture evaporation, further increasing your risk of developing mold. Turn ceiling fans on at least low speed, especially when leaving your residence unoccupied for periods of time. Also, since most closets do not have A/C supply vents, leave the doors open to closets and bedrooms to increase air circulation. Additionally, leave space between clothes hanging in the closets to facilitate air flow through the clothes. Use Damp Rid bags in closets to trap excess moisture. Also, leave 3- to 4-inch gaps between your walls and furniture.
- Condensation, especially in the colder months, can collect in the corners of windows and door casings, causing moisture impacts which lead to mold growth. **Collected moisture/water in the corners of windows and door casings should be dried with a towel routinely and a Tilex-type product applied where needed.**
- **Periodically visually inspect all potential water sources.** This includes kitchen and bathroom vanity plumbing under the cabinets, toilet water supply, refrigerator water lines, A/C condensation drainpipes, and hot water heaters. Identifying moisture/water intrusions early can prevent costly remediation of water damage and mold. Upon discovery of visible mold impacts, it is important to contain/cover the visible mold growth if possible to help prevent airborne mold spores from impacting other rooms and areas until a remediation plan is implemented. For example, if moisture and mold impacts are discovered to the wall behind your refrigerator or inside a bathroom vanity cabinet, you should not remove the wall or cabinet without considering how to control/limit the release of mold spores into the indoor air. As mold dries, the mold spores become airborne more easily.



- **Please turn off the water to your residence at the meter whenever you plan to be away more than 24 hours.** I have been involved in too many major remediations that could have been prevented if the homeowner had just turned the water off before they left home.
- Your carpet collects almost every spilled material, tracked soil, and settled airborne contaminant that enters your home, including bacteria, allergens, and pollutants. Laminated flooring is more durable than carpet but once subjected to moisture/water, cupping of the joints and swelling of the boards can occur. In addition, moisture/water that seeps underneath the laminated flooring is trapped by the flooring, causing mold growth between the flooring and subfloor. **Ceramic tile, however, is durable and resistant to most moisture/water impacts.**
- **Placing UV lights inside the air handler has proven to be effective in preventing mold growth inside the air handler housing** but can be costly. The ideal location for UV lights is inside the air handler, especially if the UV lights are placed near elements of the system where moisture most often collects, such as the coils and drip pan.

Following the above-referenced tips will help prevent mold growth inside your home. If you want additional information or have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to the opportunity to be of service to you.

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