

# 5

## minute safety talk



## Controlling Indoor Mold

What is it? Why is it growing in my home? And most importantly, how do I get rid of it? These are the basic questions we all want to know when it comes to indoor mold.

Molds are part of the natural environment. Outdoors, they have the important role of breaking down dead organic material such as wood, leaves, and other unwanted plant debris. However, indoor growth is a problem that can cause damage to your home, your furniture – and your health.

Molds produce microscopic spores that float through the air. When they land on a damp area within your home, they begin growing and digesting whatever they attach to – wood, carpet, drywall, food, paper, etc. Many people are sensitive to molds. Exposure can irritate the eyes, skin, nose, throat, and lungs, and also trigger asthma episodes. More severe reactions may occur when people are exposed to a large amount of mold or molds that produce airborne toxins.

### Preventative Measures

Moisture control is the key element in preventing indoor mold. Although mold cannot be eliminated, there are many actions you can take to manage this problem:

- Inspect your home for water stains and water damage. Common sites for indoor mold growth include bathroom tile and grout, basement walls, and areas around windows and sinks. There is also a possibility for hidden mold, such as that found between wallpaper and walls, underneath carpets, etc. Hidden mold can often be detected by its smell or the presence of a newly reported health problem.
- Check drip pans below your refrigerator and air conditioners on a regular basis, as mold can grow within the water collected.
- Fix leaks or spills immediately. If an organic building material (wood, carpet, drywall, etc.) is properly dried out within 48 hours after water infiltrates the surface, the probability of mold growth greatly decreases. However, mold is more likely to grow in areas where the moisture content lingers above 12% for more than 48 hours.

- Control water penetration from the outside of your home. Regularly inspect your roof and siding. Also make sure your property slopes away from your home to avoid water collecting at the foundation.
- Control humidity levels by:
  - Providing adequate ventilation within your home, including the use of exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms and an outside vent for your clothes dryer.
  - Using dehumidifiers and air conditioners.
  - Acting quickly if you see moisture collecting on windows, walls, or pipes. Possible solutions include covering surfaces with insulation, or increasing ventilation or air temperature.
- Keep indoor humidity levels between 30-50% (mold flourishes in levels approaching 70%). Check levels by using a moisture or humidity meter, available at many hardware stores.

### Mold Removal

If you find a small area of mold on a hard surface within your home, you can remove it yourself by scrubbing the area with water and a mild detergent, and then drying the area completely. If there is mold growth on absorbent or porous materials, such as ceiling tiles and carpet, they may have to be thrown away. Remember, in addition to mold removal and clean-up, it's important to identify and fix the original moisture source.

When cleaning, always wear the appropriate personal protective equipment. Avoid breathing in mold spores by using a properly fitted N-95 respirator. Use long rubber gloves to prevent your bare hands from touching mold. Wear goggles (without ventilation holes) to prevent mold or mold spores from getting into your eyes. Also, make sure to ventilate the area and exhaust the air to the outdoors. If the area of mold in your home is large, or you suspect that you have hidden mold, contact a professional for removal.

If mold is found at your workplace, make sure the situation is reported to the proper employees and response actions are taken by internal staff or outside contractors as per your organization's policy.