



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Water-damaged buildings may harbor mold

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health urges the public to take precautionary measures to avoid indoor air quality problems as they repair their flood-damaged homes and buildings. Recent flooding creates opportunity for molds to grow.

"Molds are mainly a health hazard to that part of the population that is allergic to them," said Sal Gray, program director for the Indoor Air Quality/Lead Branch at the Alabama Department of Public Health. "Proper clean-up of molds decreases the amount available to cause symptoms. If there has been mold growth of more than 15 square feet, contact a professional."

In addition, obtain professional help if you suspect that your heating/ventilation/air conditioning system may be contaminated with mold. If the water damage was caused by sewage or other contaminated water, contact a professional who has experience in cleaning and repairing buildings damaged by contaminated water.

Most molds do not cause infections, but some molds are a health risk to people with immune problems such as HIV infection, cancer patients taking chemotherapy, and people who have received organ transplants.

To protect against health risks associated with mold:

- Remove standing water from your home, office or business.
- Remove wet materials such as carpets, pads, insulation, wallboard, pillows and mattresses. If mold growth has already occurred, carefully remove the moldy material.
- Use personal protective equipment when cleaning or removing mold. These are gloves, goggles and an N-95 particle respirator (found at most hardware stores). This type of respirator may resemble a paper dust mask with a nozzle on the front. Other respirators are made primarily of plastic or rubber and have a removable cartridge that traps most of the mold spores from entering.
- While cleaning up, take breaks in a well-ventilated area.
- Individuals with heart disease, chronic lung disease such as asthma or emphysema, or with known mold allergies should not perform mold removal work.
- Do not mix bleach with anything except water. Mixing bleach with other liquids, especially those containing ammonia, could produce hazardous gases from a chemical reaction. A safer alternative is to use fungicide or mold-removing products that are available at any hardware store instead of bleach. Read and follow label instructions carefully. Open windows and doors to provide plenty of fresh air.

Proper cleanup needs to be done to remove the musty, earthy smell from buildings. The first step in cleanup is to remove sources of moisture since remaining moisture will create the humidity causing more mold to grow. Fix any leaks and remove all water. Using a "wet-dry" shop vacuum (or the vacuum function of a carpet steam cleaner) may be helpful. Use fans and open windows, dehumidifiers, or air conditioning to lower the humidity.

Remove all sheetrock to at least 12 inches above the high water mark. Prevent the growth of mold on hard surfaces such as glass, plastic and metal by cleaning with detergent and water. To remove mold growth from hard surfaces, use commercial products, soap and water or a bleach solution of 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water. Use a stiff brush on rough surfaces such as concrete.

For more information, consult the following Web sites:

- <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp>
- <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/cleanupwater.asp>
- <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/images/moldguide.pdf>

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