

FACT SHEET

Mould - The Householders Guide to Fighting Mould

WHAT IS MOULD?

Moulds are types of fungi that can grow on a range of materials that are damp and usually in dark places.

Moulds:

- need moisture to grow
- thrive in high humid conditions
- can grow on walls, timber, carpet, furniture and fabrics
- can give off an unpleasant odour
- cause people to sneeze
- can cause asthma attacks and other respiratory illness in at risk children and adults

HOW TO CONTROL MOULD

The main ways of controlling mould growth is by:

- ventilation
- heat
- insulation
- general household maintenance
- removal

VENTILATION

The simplest and most effective way to prevent mould from growing is to ventilate a room and/or appliances where moisture builds-up. This can be achieved by:

- opening windows and doors to provide fresh air in the home and reduce the humidity level. If possible, ventilate continuously and evenly by having at least one window slightly open for most of the time rather than having it wide open for a short time
- installing and using mechanical ventilation (exhaust fans) that are vented to outside air, particularly in the bathroom. This can eliminate much of the moisture that builds up from everyday activities.
- ventilating the attic and 'crawl' spaces to prevent moisture build-up
- installing ventilation over appliances that produce moisture, such as clothes driers, stoves, kerosene heaters, unflued gas heaters, water heaters and fireplaces

HEATING

Heating with dry heat can help to reduce moisture and mould growth. Try to have a continuous low level of heating rather than short bursts of high heat. Continuous, even heating will allow the walls and ceilings to warm up. On cool days, try to keep the inside temperature of the house at least 5 degrees C higher than the outside temperature outside.

Moulds are a type of fungi and they can be found virtually everywhere – indoors and outdoors. For mould spores to grow and reproduce, a food source (e.g. dust) and moisture is required.

The most common types of moulds are not considered hazardous to humans, however some indoor moulds may cause health problems. For this reason, it is best to remove mould as soon as it appears in the home.

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INSULATION

Good insulation will keep warmth in the house and will help reduce moisture and mould problems. This can be achieved by:

- insulating walls and ceilings so they remain warmer for longer. This will reduce the likelihood of water vapour condensation conditions that are ideal for mould growth
- insulating hot and cold surfaces, such as water pipes



Mould grown on a ceiling

GENERAL HOUSEHOLD MAINTENANCE

It is important to maintain your house structurally to prevent moisture and mould problems from occurring. General household maintenance includes:

Structural maintenance

- Check the roof for leaks and broken roof tiles.
- Fix leaky plumbing as soon as possible. (Check for black, brown, orange, pink or green speckled walls around plumbing and tiles).
- Ensure weep holes on the outside of the building are not blocked. Weep holes allow drainage of water and the escape of moisture and vapour pressure from the internal walls.
- Over winter, and especially in spring the weep holes in your window frames (aluminium frames) can get clogged. If these get clogged, water will stand in the lower window frame sections.
- Check for leaky doors or windows that may have broken seals.
- Ensure vents or air ducts are not clogged.
- Check for leaky toilets/bathtub seals.
- Check the seals around kitchen sinks/basins to ensure they are sealed correctly.
- Make sure there are no swollen or crumbling walls or buckling floor boards.
- Check for stained ceiling or wall tiles (you may be surprised as to what may be growing underneath).

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Cleaning

- Clean the bathroom frequently to keep mould to a minimum. It is recommended that you use bleach based cleaning products.
- Make sure clothes and shoes are dry before putting them away into the wardrobe or clothes storing area.
- Evaporation trays in air conditioners, dehumidifiers and refrigerators should be cleaned frequently.
- If using cool mist or ultrasonic humidifiers, clean appliances according to manufacturer's instructions and refill with fresh water daily.
- Regularly clean carpets and rugs to prevent harbourage of mould spores.
- Thoroughly clean and dry water-damaged carpets and building materials (within 24 hours if possible) or consider removal and replacement. Water-damaged carpets and building materials can harbour mould and bacteria. It is very difficult to completely rid such materials of these contaminants. It may be necessary to remove the carpet because the mould and/or spores may be impossible to remove completely.
- If water leaks or spills occur indoors it is important to clean and dry the area immediately or preferably within 24-48 hours to prevent mould from growing.

Wardrobes/cupboards

- Allow plenty of ventilation in wardrobes. Leave doors open when possible.
- If your wardrobe has been affected by mould growth, regularly clean the wardrobe with bleach based products to prevent mould spores from growing. *Caution: Take care when using bleach near clothing.*
- Use a semi-gloss paint on wooden surfaces. Untreated woods are more prone to moisture absorbency than semi-gloss painted surfaces and treated timbers.

Garden Maintenance

- Don't let the foundation of the building stay wet. Ensure gutters and down pipes drain into soak wells to ensure adequate rainwater drainage away from the building.
- Ensure garden beds are not higher than the foundation of the building. This will prevent moisture migrating into the walls.
- Clean roof gutters regularly.
- Prune overhanging trees near the roof to prevent leaves accumulating in gutters.

Other

- Consider installing sky lights in darker areas of the house.
- Keep the number of indoor plants to a minimum.

REMOVING MOULD

Mould can be removed from any surface with a diluted solution of bleach. However, test the effect of bleach on a small part of the surface before applying it to the whole area. After applying the mixture (one part bleach to three parts water) leave the treated surface for about 20 minutes and then lightly sponge with clean water.

Small areas of mould may become larger over time if ignored, so it is important to clean up and remove even small patches of mould. You may need to seek professional help if there is a lot of mould or if the mould keeps coming back.

Mould will reappear until its source of moisture is removed. High moisture levels that are not corrected can make the moulds grow back quickly. Cleaning is only a temporary but an essential measure.

Remember: When cleaning mould you should wear gloves, glasses or goggles, and a respirator or face mask to protect yourself from mould spores.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Does mould cause health problems?

Some types of mould can lead to health problems by breaking down the immune system. Symptoms can present as a runny nose, eye irritation, cough, congestion, and asthma-type problems or respiratory infections. Other reported symptoms include fatigue, nausea and headaches. Many of the symptoms are consistent with someone who has allergies.

I'm renting a property with mould problems what do I do?

Mould and mildew caused by faults in gutters or other fixtures should be remedied by the owner, but the tenant must ensure there is adequate ventilation throughout, to help avoid mould problems in winter.

If you have taken measures to ensure the building is properly ventilated and mould is still growing, you should raise the issue with the owner.

I have tried everything to get rid of mould, and nothing works. Who can help me?

If you have taken measures to prevent mould from growing in your building and you are still having problems, you may wish to seek the services of a building consultant/building inspector. Look in the yellow pages under 'building consultant' or 'building inspector' for a list of companies who may assist you with advice on structural and moisture damage to your building.

For further information contact the Environmental Health Officer at Hunter New England Population Health by telephoning (02) 4924 6477.