
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO GUIDANCE OF THE PREVENTION OF MOLD GROWTH

PURPOSE:

To provide guidance for the prevention of mold growth.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Mold is a fungus that grows in the form of multicellular filaments called hyphae and spreads on various kinds of damp or decaying organic matter. There are many different mold species that come in many different colors. Molds are sometimes referred to as mildew. They are found both indoors and outdoors in all climates, during all seasons of the year. Outdoors, molds survive by using plants and decaying organic matter such as fallen leaves as a source of nutrition. Indoors, molds need moisture and a carbon source from building materials or building contents to grow.

Mold can enter a building through open doorways, windows, vents, and heating and air conditioning systems. Mold in the air outside can also attach itself to clothing, shoes, and pets and can be carried indoors.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF THERE IS A MOLD PROBLEM?

Most mold infestations can be seen or smelled.

HOW CAN MOLD AFFECT PEOPLE?

Mold may cause a variety of health effects. Some people are sensitive to molds. For these people, exposure to molds can lead to symptoms such as stuffy nose, wheezing, and red or itchy eyes or skin. Some people, such as those with allergies to molds or with asthma, may have more intense reactions. Severe reactions may include fever and shortness of breath.

WHAT DOES MOLD NEED TO GROW?

Molds can grow on any substance, as long as moisture or water, oxygen, and an organic source are present. Molds reproduce by creating tiny spores (viable seeds) that usually cannot be seen without magnification. Mold spores continually float through the indoor and outdoor air.

When mold spores drop on places where there is excessive moisture, such as where leakage may have occurred in roofs, pipes, walls, or where there has been flooding, they will grow. Many building materials provide suitable nutrients that encourage mold to grow. Wet cellulose materials, including paper and paper products, cardboard, ceiling tiles, wood, and wood products, are particularly conducive for the growth of some molds. Other materials such as dust, paints, wallpaper, insulation materials, drywall, carpet, fabric, and upholstery, commonly support mold growth.

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CONDITIONS FOR AN INCREASED RISK FOR MOLD GROWTH:

1. Temperatures above 70 degrees Fahrenheit
2. High humidity above 55%.
3. Water damage
4. Dampness

TIPS FOR MOLD PREVENTION:

- Repair plumbing leaks and leaks in the building structure as soon as possible.
- Look for condensation and wet spots. Fix source(s) of moisture incursion problem(s) as soon as possible.
- Prevent moisture from condensing by increasing surface temperature or reducing the moisture level in the air (humidity).
 - To increase surface temperature, insulate or increase air circulation.
 - To reduce the moisture level in the air, repair leaks, increase ventilation (if outside air is cold and dry), or dehumidify (if outdoor air is warm and humid).
- Keep HVAC drip pans clean, flowing properly, and unobstructed.
- Perform regularly scheduled building/HVAC inspections and maintenance, including filter changes.
- Maintain indoor relative humidity below 55%.
- Vent moisture-generating appliances, such as dryers, to the outside where possible.
- Vent kitchens (cooking areas) and bathrooms according to local code requirements.
- Clean and dry wet or damp spots as soon as possible, but no more than 48 hours after discovery.
- Provide adequate drainage around buildings, sloping the ground away from building foundations. Follow all local building codes.
- Pinpoint areas where leaks have occurred, identify the causes, and take preventive action to ensure that they do not reoccur.

Moisture control is the key to mold control. When water/roof leaks or spills occur indoors, act promptly.